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CHRISTIAN UNION.

CHRISTIAN UNION;

OR,

AN ARGUMENT FOR THE ABOLITION OF

SECTS.

BY ABRAHAM VAN DYCK,
COUNSELLOR AT LAW.

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. — Matt. xii. 25.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . . . *that there be no divisions among you.* — 1 Cor. i. 10.

And the glory which thou givest me, I have given them, *that they may be one, even as we are one.* — John xvii. 22.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

NEW-YORK:

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DEDICATION.

To the Rev. David Abeel, American Missionary to South Eastern Asia.

Rev. and Dear Sir:

Entertaining the highest respect for your Christian character and intelligence, and appreciating your fervent zeal in the cause of our common Master, as well as your services and self-denial in the promotion of his kingdom as a minister and a missionary, I deem myself happy in dedicating to you this publication.

The divisions in the church of Christ have long been to me, as they have been to many of the friends of religion, the cause of much anxious solicitude; to none, perhaps, more so than to the missionary among the heathen. *He*, having escaped from the atmosphere and influence of sect, soon learns to stand on the broad ground of the Bible, is enabled to take an impartial view of the nature, use, and wants of the church, and perceives the sin and folly of controversy and warfare among the friends of Christ, when all the energy and strength of union is required to resist and vanquish the hosts of darkness.

From my personal knowledge of your catholic principles, the tenor of your communications made from the places of your missionary labours, and the sentiments expressed in your public addresses since your return

from Asia, I am persuaded you have often, while in heathen lands, exclaimed with Henry Martyn, "How small and unimportant are the hair-splitting disputes of the blessed people at home, compared with the formidable agents of the devil which we have to combat here!" and that, with David Brainerd, you have felt a deep abhorrence and loathing of every thing like party in religion.

The question has often presented itself to those who have mourned over the breaches in the family of Christ, What must be done to heal them, so that the church may not only appear in all the genuine beauty of its original unity, as constituted by its Head, but may present an unbroken front to withstand the many and powerful adversaries which impede her march to the conquest of the world? This question is attempted to be answered in the following pages, in which the author has also assumed the task of proving that the division of the church into sects is unlawful, unconstitutional, and pregnant with evil. He has likewise presented such motives as appear to him to be of sufficient weight to induce every friend of the church, who may receive the doctrine herein advanced, to put forth his efforts to restore its unity.

I am, Rev. and Dear Sir,

Yours in the love of the gospel,

THE AUTHOR.

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PREFACE.

The main subject discussed in the following pages was some years ago pressed, by a particular providence, upon the attention of the author, and has continued to occupy more or less of his thoughts ever since that time. He has endeavoured to discover the truth by a direct application and study of the Holy Scriptures; and the result has been a strong and settled conviction of the correctness of the principles advocated in this work. He believes that the church was originally constituted by its Founder one and indivisible—that the divisions which have broken it in pieces are in direct violation of this constitution, and have brought a flood of evils upon the church, which have hitherto kept her from rising to the glory to which she is destined.

The author does not advocate an immediate or hasty amalgamation of sects, or the formation of churches embracing all Christians of every creed. He earnestly deprecates such measures until a better feeling shall prevail than exists at the present time. But he insists that as the church was originally constituted one, and will be one in heaven, and also on earth in the period of the latter day glory, it ought to be one now; but since it is not, that Christians are under obligation to restore its unity, and ought to enter immediately upon the work of prepa-

ration to bring about this desirable result. He has ventured to specify some of the means which he believes will tend to promote it, though he admits that the chief reliance must be on the direction of God, as to the proper means, and his blessing upon them. And this direction and blessing he is confident will not be withholden, when God's people shall have entered in earnest upon the work. It is not deemed necessary to make any apology for presenting this book to the public. The doctrines it advances are not new, but have had their advocates ever since the protestant church has been despoiled of her beauty and shorn of her strength by the loss of her unity. But their voice has been unheard or unheeded amidst the din of religious controversy, and the rage of party feeling. The author is persuaded that at the present time the state of the church imperiously calls for a work of the kind now presented, and that the minds of many are prepared to give it a cordial welcome, although the great mass may yet be unwilling to listen to the overture of union. A considerable change, he thinks, has manifested itself in the feelings of Christians in the course of a few months past. He believes that now, in the midst of existing distractions and divisions, the spirit of union is operating upon the hearts of God's children, and that there are now many encouragements to the immediate commencement of the work of healing the breaches of Zion.

The author is not an advocate for latitudinarian prin-

ciples, and would not open the doors of the church wider than the Scriptures require, nor does he wittingly undervalue the importance of any religious truth. But he believes that aside from the cardinal doctrines of man's depravity and guilt in the sight of a holy God—the way of his pardon, and restoration to Divine favour through the blood and mediation of his Son, and the necessity of regeneration through the influence of the Holy Spirit—there is not, perhaps, any truth of the Bible more important to the prosperity of the church than the doctrine of its unity. Now is there any duty of more pressing obligation upon Christians at the present time than that of labouring and making every allowable sacrifice to terminate its divisions, and bring it back to its original unity?

THE AUTHOR.

January, 1835.

A SKETCH

OF THE

LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

The author of this volume was a lawyer by profession, and died in February, 1835, at his residence in Coxsackie, N. Y. Though a man of talents, he was never ambitious of notoriety. He was always ready to do his duty, but never wished to appear conspicuous; yet his general character was well known to many friends of morality and religion in this country. To others, the following extracts of a letter may not be unacceptable:

"A memoir of Mr. Van Dyck, if justice could be done to the subject, could not fail of being in a high degree, both interesting and useful. He was a Christian of uncommon attainments in religious experience, as well as knowledge. It could truly be said of him, that he lived near to God. Sometimes for months together, in the best sense, he walked in the light of his countenance. At such seasons, divine communion was the element in which his mind habitually moved. So strongly did his thoughts and desires tend upwards, that, at every cessation of professional business, or worldly cares, he found himself with God. Of such things, he was by no means very communicative. He never loved to talk of himself; he always shunned it if he could; yet at times, to an intimate friend, and for some good purpose, he was willing to declare what the Lord had

done for his soul. At the close of his life, he was in a state of perfect peace and assurance. For the last five years, scarce a momentary cloud ever obscured his prospects; yet he was no enthusiast. No man examined more carefully the ground on which he trod, or could more intelligently give a reason of his hope.

"He had habitually very exalted and endearing views of God and Christ; and was very sensitive to every thing that might effect his intercourse with them. His mind was much occupied with these great objects, and was much alive to their glory. Hence he not only abounded in prayer, but delighted in it. He loved to pray. It was a pleasure, and not a burden. The sanctuary, the social meeting, the family and the closet, all bore witness to his devotional spirit. His prayers were particularly remarkable for the confession of sin. That abominable thing was exceedingly his abhorrence; and he saw a great deal of it where ordinary Christians see but little. His sensibility on this point increased very much in his last days; yet he was not a gloomy but cheerful Christian. — Equally remarkable was he in prayer for a pleading spirit, and for a childlike simplicity of manner. Then he felt that he had no ground of reliance, but the mediation of Christ; and that here he could rest with the utmost confidence. No person could attach more importance to the divinity, atonement, and intercession of Christ, as practical doctrines, especially in prayer. Then he would dwell with peculiar interest on the infinite love and grace of God exhibited in the gospel, as encouragement to prayer, and as calculated to affect the hearts of sinners. No one could attach greater importance to the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit. The Comforter was a friend whom he most highly valued, and most tenderly loved. He never in-

dulged in any thing like affectation of feeling; yet his emotions in prayer were sometimes too strong for utterance. Tears then became the best expression of what passed within. Many instances could be named.

"As to doctrinal views, he was far from being loose or unsettled. He was decidedly what is commonly called a Calvinist; though he was by no means so bigotted but that he could clearly distinguish between what was, and what was not, essential to the system. The relative importance which he ascribed to various truths, was regulated by the best standard. In this respect, as in others, he was eminently a Bible Christian. The sacred volume he studied a great deal; and that with an humble and teachable disposition. The Spirit he loved to honour in looking for his aid to understand the Scriptures. By this means, he found them an inexhaustible treasure, from which he became greatly enriched.

"Enlightened by revelation, he looked upon the progress of society with the deepest interest. He took pleasure in the fact, that in this country, from the liberal nature of our institutions, necessity was laid upon us for promoting the intellectual and moral improvement of all classes. He anticipated a time when the associations and intercouse of men, would depend more on moral worth, than artificial distinctions. He thought our aim should be to raise the people, and receive from them every wholesome influence. He looked upon mankind with the Bible in his hand; then, seeing at once their ruin, and the way of their recovery, he was anxious that the remedy should be applied without delay. Regarding the gospel as the only moral renovator of the world, he was very anxious to see its free course, both at home and abroad. For this end, he not only prayed, but laboured and expended. Few persons, in proportion to

their means, gave as much for benevolent objects; and no where, certainly, was there a more cheerful giver. Upon the church, likewise, he looked with the Bible in his hand; and seeing by its light many things that appeared wrong, he was anxious to see them brought back to where the apostles had left them. Particularly did he long to see that brotherly love, and that union of feeling and effort in the great work of the world's salvation, for which Christians were once so remarkable. What Mr. Grimke called "the genius of the existing order of things," he regarded as an incubus upon the church, which stifled her life an energy.

"From what has now been said, it might be inferred, that he must have neglected the common duties of life, and those of his profession. This, however, was far from being the case. By diligence, and a proper division of time, he was able to attend to these, as well as to his religious duties. His brethren of the bar will testify, that as a lawyer, he did a great deal, and did it well. Yet religion was his delight. A few years before his death, he entertained serious thoughts of relinquishing the practice of law, for the purpose of being more directly and extensively engaged in doing good. On reflection, however, he became convinced that it was not his duty.

"These must be regarded as merely a few, brief, and very imperfect hints, of what he was. A full portrait would require a volume. None, who have enjoyed opportunities of knowing him, will hesitate to place him in the same rank with such men as Evarts, Grimke and Wirt."

CHRISTIAN UNION;

OR,

AN ARGUMENT FOR THE ABOLITION OF SECTS.

SHOULD our Saviour this day come down from heaven, take up his abode on earth, and in his human nature assume the immediate government of the church, would he look with complacency on its divisions into sects and denominations? Would his scattered followers appear in his eye as different streams, all beautifully flowing into one mighty river, or as one great army, composed of many legions, all having the same views, and harmoniously co-operating under the same counsels? Would he not rather express his sorrow and indignation that the demon of discord had been permitted to sow dissention among his disciples, and that thereby the world, instead of having been subdued into faithful subjection to his kingdom, by the united power of his forces, is yet as to nine-tenths of it, under the dominion of Heathenism, delusion, and error.

The personal advent of Christ is expected by only a small number of his professed disciples; and for all the purposes of our present subject, we may take it for granted, that he will continue on his throne in heaven, until his mediatorial work shall be completed; and that to the end of the world he will govern the church by his ministers, his word, and his spirit, and upon the principles declared in the Scriptures of everlasting truth; so that we must needs be content to answer the above inquiries from what is taught in the Bible, instead of waiting for a new revelation from the great head of the church, whose word, already written, endureth for ever.

Among Protestant Christians there are some who maintain that the division of the church into sects and denominations, instead of being detrimental, is rather advantageous to her best interests. A second class apprehend it to be injurious, but entertain so little hope of healing the division, that they give a ready ear to any flatterer that may undertake to show its advantages, and are thus kept in a state of doubt, and consequent inaction. There is another class, who seem to be convinced that the schisms in the church are a great evil, but do not put forth a wish to have a remedy applied in any other way than by the universal prevalence of the sect to which they belong. And we are happy in the belief that there are also many among the people of God, who are perfectly convinced that the rending asunder of the church of Christ is the source of many and great evils, and that it is a flagrant breach of the unity of the church, as constituted by its head; and who are desiring and praying that the omniscient God may lead his children to discern and carry into effect the proper remedy. There are probably but few intelligent Christians, whose minds are not,

in some measure, exercised upon this important subject. A spirit of solicitude and inquiry is abroad, and the interest of the attentive disciple is increased by what he sees to be transpiring in the providence of God. The finger of the Almighty is pointing to a re-union of the church, according to its original constitution, as the only hope of saving her from being torn into such fragments as to render it impossible to sustain her institutions.

We believe that God has graciously provided a remedy for all the evils that afflict his church, and that the time and measure of redress depend upon the discernment and faithful exertions of his children, in an humble reliance upon his assistance. We are confident that the evil of division is palpable and intolerable, and that the remedy is obviously indicated in the word of God itself. But as the first step towards relief is to convince the serious and watchful Christian of the existence of the evil, and the next step is to point out the remedy, and show the practicability of its successful application, we make our earnest appeal to Christians of every denomination, entreating their candid and patient attention to the discussion of these momentous topics.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH.

1. *Proof that the Church is one.* Unity essential to accomplish God's design in establishing the Church. Its unity indicated in the Old Testament. Taught in the New Testament by Christ and his Apostles. — 2. *Division into Sects is a breach of its unity.* So believed the Apostles, the primitive Christians of the three first centuries, and the Reformers, and so teaches Christ in his intercessory prayer, and in his figure of the vine and its branches. So teaches Paul in his figure of the human body and its members, of a family, of a sheep-fold. The *bond of union* is love, and that is preserved by forbearance in matters of opinion and practice.

THE church of God was set up prior to the manifestation of Jesus Christ in the flesh; whether in Abraham, as the father of the faithful, or in the descendants of Jacob, or at what period of the Old Testament history, it is not material to our present purpose to determine. The design of God in the erection of the church, was, in the first stage of its existence, to preserve a holy seed for his worship and service in the midst of an idolatrous and wicked world; to receive and transmit to future generations the revelation of God's will to man in his fallen

state; and ultimately to diffuse the knowledge and influence of religion throughout the whole earth.

Although the holy spirit, speaking by the mouth of David, and the prophets subsequent to his day, foretold a future period, when the church should appear in the greatness and glory to which God had destined her, his ultimate design, in the erection of the church, was not communicated to the Old Testament saints, in the form of a command to extend her bounds and influence, so as to embrace the whole family of mankind. This was reserved until the time of the appearance of Christ in the world, and then was the command given by himself to his disciples to teach all nations, and to preach the gospel to every creature. Yet God, who sees and comprehends all things, from the beginning to the end, so constituted the church, at its first erection, as to combine in it the principles of that moral power which he saw to be necessary for the accomplishment of his ultimate design. The church was to be the instrument, in his hands, of resisting the assaults of wicked men and the hosts of hell, and eventually to vanquish them, and deliver the world from the thraldom of Satan and sin, by bringing it under the lawful and happy dominion of the Saviour.

Whenever power, either of a physical or of a moral nature, is placed in the hands of members, it is essential that there should be between them all that union of which they are capable. And God has most unequivocally declared his mind, that the individuals composing his church, should be held together by a strong, indissoluble bond of union.

1. *God has constituted the church one* and indivisible.

It has but one head, and that is Christ. Col. i. 18. Under the Old Testament dispensation, prior to the build-

ing of the temple, the manifestation of God's glory was in the cloud and in the tabernacle. There was but one cloud, and there was only one tabernacle, nor was there more than one ark of the covenant. And thus was the *unity* of the church represented in that period. After the children of Israel had taken full possession of the land of promise, the unity of the church was demonstrated by the erection of one temple; and to this one temple all the tribes of Israel were commanded to resort for the public worship of Jehovah.

If the unity of the church constituted any portion of its excellence, beauty, or strength, under the first dispensations, it would be strange indeed, if, under the New Testament, we had found a warrant for the severance of this union. In the history of our Lord and Saviour, we find no intimation from him that the unity of the church was not to be preserved, nor any warrant for a division of the church into distinct denominations, sects, or parties. His intercessory prayer for his church, which consists of all believers, is, "that they *all may be one*," as the father was in him and he in the father, "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." John, xvii. 21. And in the next verse he says, "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one." These words do most evidently convey the idea of a most intimate union between the followers of Christ, even as that which subsisted between him and his father; and this union was to be visible to all mankind, that the world, seeing the union of his disciples, might believe that the father had sent him. An union of heart, merely without an open visible union, which the world would perceive, could have no influence in convincing the world of the divine mission of Christ.

Valuable and indispensable as an union of heart among believers is to the prosperity and beauty of the church, it is the open, visible, and known union of the disciples, that must conquer the prejudices and convince the understandings of the men of the world into the belief that Jesus Christ came from God. There is no force, no appropriateness, (be it spoken with reverence,) in the prayer, if an union of heart is all that is asked. No; this prayer of our Lord will not be answered; the avowed object for which he desired that his people might be one, will not be accomplished, until Christians shall be one in affection, in counsel, in action, and in name.

Though the personal ministry of Christ was confined to the Jewish nation, he knew that under the dispensation of the spirit and through the preaching of the Apostles, the Gentiles would also be called into the church, which before that period embraced only the children of Israel. When the Gentiles should thus be brought to embrace the gospel, there was not to be a Gentile church as distinguished from that of the Jews, and a line of division drawn between them; but they together were to form one church. In express reference to that event the Saviour says, John x. 16, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also must I bring in, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be *one fold* and one shepherd." And after the gospel had, subsequent to the death of the Saviour, been propagated among the Gentiles, and many in the city of Ephesus had been received into the family of believers, St. Paul, in the second chapter of his epistle, addressing the Ephesian converts, says, "But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ, for he is our peace, who *hath made both one*, and hath

broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain *one new man*, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and came and preached peace to you which were afar off and to them that were nigh. For by him we both have access by one spirit unto the father."

The doctrine of the unity of the church, so plainly declared by the Saviour, was taught and earnestly inculcated by his Apostles, under the plenary inspiration of the Holy Ghost. St. Paul represents the unity of the church under the figure of a human body, consisting, indeed, of many members, but between which there is an intimate union and necessary dependence, and between which a schism cannot take place, without endangering the destruction of the body itself. "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many are one body; so also is Christ." 1 Cor. xii. 12. "For the body is not one member but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" v. 14, 15. "Now are they many members yet but one body, and the eye cannot say to the hand I have no need of thee, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." v. 20, 21. "That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." v. 25, 26, 27.

When the same Apostle reproves the Corinthians for

their contentions and divisions, he proves to them the inadmissibility and absurdity of such divisions, by putting the emphatic question, "Is Christ divided?" leaving it to themselves to draw the inference irresistibly flowing from it, that as Christ, the head of the church, is one and indivisible, so must the members of Christ, constituting the church, be one among themselves, as well as one with him. 1 Cor. i. 10 to 13. Believers are declared by St. Paul to be members of Christ's body. Eph. v. 30. "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 1 Cor. xii. 27. "Ye are the body of Christ and members in particular." And they are declared to be members one of another, constituting the body of Christ. Rom. xii. 4, 5. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." The saints are declared to be *the family* of God on earth, excluding the idea that there may be more than a single family constituting the church of Christ. And in the first chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle beseeches them, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they all speak the same thing, and *that there be no divisions* among them; but that they be *perfectly joined together* in the same mind and in the same judgement. 1 Cor. i. 10.

2. *The division of the church into sects is a violation of its constitutional unity.*

Having proved the unity of the church by the constitution of God himself, we proceed to show that its division into denominations and sects, is a violation of this unity. A division into congregations cannot be understood to be a breach of this unity, when made for the

sake of local convenience, and in the spirit of love; but we speak of those divisions which result from disagreement and contention, and from the assumed impossibility or difficulty of remaining together in peace.

The unity of the church was understood in this sense by Christ himself; and it was so understood by his Apostles after his ascension into heaven, and the plenary effusion of the holy spirit on the day of Pentecost. That some difference would arise among true believers, on doctrinal and practical subjects, was known to the Saviour and his Apostles; for they were well acquainted with the imperfections of the human understanding; but neither he nor they could have suffered the thought of a division of the church, for such a cause, to have been harboured for a moment in the minds of Christians.

Every reader of the Acts of the Apostles knows that an unhappy disagreement arose between Paul, who was specially designated to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and some of the Jews in those parts where he ministered. When the news of this disagreement was carried to Jerusalem, some of the Apostles who laboured in that city and in the adjoining country of the Jews, took sides against Paul. It is evident, from the fifteenth chapter of the Acts, taken in connexion with the second chapter of the epistle to the Galatians, that this matter caused a strong excitement, easily accounted for from the nature of the subject, and the circumstances attending the case. But neither party took the ground that they might be considered as belonging, one to the Jewish and the other to the Gentile church, and so each pursue his own course independently of the other. No; they knew they must be united; that they had no right to rend asunder the church which God had joined together in the bond of in-

violable union; and that by suffering the commencement of schisms, a train of evils would be brought upon the church of which they were unable to calculate the amount of duration. Paul, taking with him Barnabas and Titus, went to Jerusalem, and conferred with the other Apostles; an amicable understanding was, after considerable difficulty, effected, and the threatened rupture happily avoided; the parties acting in the spirit of conciliation and forbearance.

Whenever dissentions arise in communities, a separation between the parties at variance, is, to the corrupt mind of man, a natural suggestion. This separation may often be proper and harmless in those communities which are not designed to be of permanent duration. And the seeds of disunion being easily sown in the church, there has been from the beginning, notwithstanding the evident design of God that the church should endure to the end of the world, a disposition for one to say to the other, in case of any disagreement, "Stand by thyself." Had Paul yielded to this spirit, how plausible might have seemed to him the expediency of setting up himself as the head of the Gentile church, leaving John, Peter, James, and the other Apostles, to manage the concerns of the Jewish church? He had been chosen and sent by Christ himself to preach the gospel to the Heathen, and in the course of his ministry among them, he was constantly vexed by the Judaising teachers, who sought to bring his converts under the yoke of the ritual law, while he was anxiously desirous that they should enjoy the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free. The establishment of a separate Gentile church might have seemed to him the most effectual measure to destroy the influence of those teachers who so much annoyed him, as well as

disturbed and injured the converts under his ministry. And the difference between the Jews and the Gentiles in their national character, education, manners, habits, and other circumstances, might have presented an ample apology to human reason for a separation from the mother church. But Paul knew that the church was *one* by the constitution of Christ its head; and that any division of it would have been utterly unlawful and inadmissible. He knew it would be presumptuous impiety in him to rebuild the partition wall which Jesus Christ, by his death, had broken down; and that he might not put asunder what his divine master had joined together.

The same Apostle, as appears from his acts and his epistles, was deeply impressed with the value of the church's unity, and the calamities that would be consequent on its violation. His whole soul seems to have been burdened with the subject. With what earnestness does he caution the believers, to whom he addresses his epistles, against this principle of division? He tells the Corinthians it had been declared to him that there were contentions among them, for that every one of them said, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephus, and I of Christ. He also tells them, "Ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying and strife and *divisions*, are ye not carnal? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?" And again, "*I beseech you*, brethren, *by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that there be no divisions among you*, but that ye be *perfectly joined together* in the same mind and in the same judgement." The Apostle does not assume to heal their dissentions by interposing his authority to settle the question which party was right, or wherein the other was

wrong; but he goes to the root of the evil, showing that the very fact of the disunion of Christians evinces the carnality, the unholy temper or habit of mind, into which they had suffered themselves to be betrayed. The Corinthians doubtless believed, as the different denominations at this day believe in regard to themselves, that they had sufficient reason for separating from those who agreed not with them in their preferences; but the Apostle does not deem it necessary for his argument to demand of them what was the difference between himself and Apollos and Cephas; nor does he instruct them that they were disputing about trifles or minor differences. He presses upon them the unity of the church, and the sin and absurdity of a division of it into distinct denominations arising from strife and disagreement. He does not admit one party to be less guilty than the other. The one that said I belong to Paul's persuasion, and he who said I believe with Apollos, and the third who enlisted himself among the admirers of Cephas, and even those, who, in the spirit and pride of sect and party, boasted of their superiority to the rest by claiming to belong to Christ,—all are alike reproved as either not understanding, or in their unholy excitements for getting the relation in which they stood to each other as members of the same body of Christ, and "members one of another." He asks with abruptness and with great pertinency and emphasis, "Is Christ divided?" As if he had said, "If there may be two or more churches, either all but one must be without a head, or the head must be divided into as many fragments as there are churches, both of which are equally impossible."

This vital principle was deeply engraven on the minds of the primitive Christians, no such thing being known

as the separation of one body of believers from another on the ground of difference in matters of opinion, or on points of practice. The church continued one and undivided through the age of the apostles, and after the death of the last surviving apostle, even to the middle of the third century. In that period the gospel had been propagated, and the church extended throughout the inhabited world, and yet no such thing as a distinct denomination of Christians was known. The church, says Milnor, "was not broken into handfuls of distinct sects and parties, all glorying in having something peculiarly excellent, and prone to despise their neighbours." See Milnor's church history, vol. I. 275, 276. And why during that long period of more than two hundred years, subsequent to the death of Christ, did the church remain unbroken? Was it because men gave but little attention to religion? Never has it so much engrossed the minds of men as during that age of the world. Was it because the gospel had not spread to a great distance, so as to come in contact with the minds of men of various habits, under different degrees of intellectual culture, and living in different parts of the earth? It had spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the world, and the church embraced within her bosom Jews and Gentiles, philosophers, princes and peasants of every clime, combining all the elements necessary to the production of schism. Was it because the men at that period were all infallibly taught and guided by the Holy Spirit in the maintenance of the same opinions, and the pursuit of the same practices? Not so: scarcely had the preaching of the gospel commenced, before differences of sentiment and practice occurred between Christians. This is evident from the epistles of the apostles Paul, James, Peter,

John, and Jude. There were even damnable heresies broached in the church as well as minor differences, in the days of the apostles ; and in the long period from their day to the middle of the third century, the world was inhabited by an intellectual population, whom, it is impossible to believe, were unanimous in their religious opinions and practices. What then was it that kept Christians together in one church? It was the strength of the principle which they believed — which they *knew* to be according to the constitution of God, that the church is one, and any division of it wholly inadmissible ; and their faithful adherence to the directions of the scriptures that heretics must be cast out of the church, and that the principle of forbearance must be applied to differences, which are not of fundamental importance. Accordingly, we find that all who were believed to be the real disciples of Christ, having been born of his spirit, were received into the church, and heretics were rejected; and this line of distinction was found sufficiently precise. Milnor's church history, vol. I. 154.

The adherence to these sound scriptural principles became, however, in process of time, weakened, as the bond of charity which held the body of believers together, was relaxed. The thing so much dreaded and so long resisted, at last happened. The church became divided. Ichabod was written upon its banner. Its glory had truly departed. The constitution of the church was violated, and as might have been expected, one disaster after another befel the church until the man of sin obtained the ascendency, and brought the dark ages upon the world. Long, very long was the earth enveloped in the gloom of night, even until the reformation from popery ushered in the light of morning. That morning was

bright. The reformed church remained one for many years, growing with the increase of God. Although minor differences arose, they were not permitted to rend her asunder. But after the lapse of years, the spirit of controversy was suffered to prevail among the successors of the reformers, and in the heat of their disputations, they separated into different sects, according to their varying creeds. The parties, however, were very reluctant to commence the business of separation. Their consciences were ill at ease, knowing as they did the unscriptural character of any division of the church of Christ. The reformers themselves, when they withdrew from the Church of Rome, did not do it on the ground that it is lawful for Christians to separate from each other. On the contrary, the only justification they avowed for leaving that church, was that she was not the church of Christ. They were agreed that the church is one, and that any division of that church is a breach of its unity.

Having shown in what sense the unity of the church was understood by the apostles, by the primitive Christians of the three first centuries, and by the reformers in the sixteenth century, we proceed to show that the constitution of the church admits of no other exposition. This constitution we have seen is coeval with the church itself; and in the intercessory prayer of the Saviour, it is recognised as applicable to the Christian church, embracing all, both Jews and Gentiles who then believed, or who should thereafter believe in his name; and for them he prays that they all may be one even as he and the Father were one. That it is the duty of believers to be united in the sense here expressed, will not be denied. The inquiry therefore is, what is the nature of that

union which Christ prays may subsist among his disciples? It is plain that he cannot be understood to refer to that ineffable union which subsits between himself and the Father, as two of the persons in the Trinity, because, of this union his creatures are not capable; but he must be understood as speaking of a union which may be predicated of mankind; and as praying for a union among his people in all those respects in which men can be bound together in the same sense that he and the Father are united. Men are capable of a union in feeling, in counsel, in action, and in name; and if Jesus and his Father are in these respects one, his disciples, if there be any meaning in words, are bound to be, also, one in the same sense. For the Saviour says in the twenty second verse, "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, *even as we are one.*" There cannot, then, be a doubt that he intended to pray for, and inculcate upon his disciples, a union of the same kind and nature in all respects, as that which subsists between him and his Father, with the single exception above mentioned, arising from the subject matter.

In what sense, then, were the Saviour and his Father one. Independently of their mysterious union above alluded to, they were one in feeling, in counsel, in action, and in name. They are *united* together *in the feeling of love* one to another. So must his children be. But so they cannot be when divided into distinct denominations; for not only do such divisions spring from the want of that degree of mutual love and forbearance necessary to hold them together in the bond of union, but they tend to weaken and destroy what of the principle of love may be remaining, and produce the contrary affec-

tions of opposition or indifference, alienation of heart and hatred.

Jesus Christ and his Father are *one in counsel*, there being no discord or contrariety in their plans. So it ought to be with those who believe in the Saviour. They should speak the same thing and be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement. 1 Cor. i. 10. But this cannot be predicated of believers belonging to opposing sects. Their counsels and their plans are not in unison ; and the very reason why they have separated is, that they could not hold counsel together, because of their various views and feelings.

The Father and his beloved Son are *one in action*. The works that Jesus seeth the Father do, these he doeth also. John, v. 19. They always act in concert. So it ought to be with believers ; they should stand fast in one spirit, and in one mind, strive together for the faith of the gospel. Phil. ii. 2. But this cannot be asserted of Christians of different persuasions. They have arrayed themselves under different banners, manifesting that they are not willing to act together ; and in point of fact each acts independently of the other. They do not strive *together* for the faith of the gospel. The faith which is propagated by the one is denied and opposed by the other. What one builds, another destroys, for the plain reason that what promotes the prosperity of one, often tends to the injury and even destruction of the other.

Our Saviour and his Father are *one in name*. There is indeed, a variety of names given to them in the Scriptures, expressive of the several perfections of their character, office, or appropriate work, not indicating opposition or contrariety, but the most perfect harmony.

So it should be with the members of Christ's church. One name ought to suffice for them all; and if more than one name be applied to them, these names should convey to the mind a harmonious and not a discordant sound; as that of believers, Christians, disciples, saints, children of God, the faithful, the just, and the like; all of which are in strict accordance with the characters and relation to Christ which they ought to exhibit. But how is it in point of fact? The very names by which Christians of different denominations are known, which they themselves have assumed, and of which all sectarians are proud, are names of distinction, to show the line of division between one and the other. As the Corinthians were some of the party of Paul, some of Apollos, and some of Cephas, so Christians now call themselves Calvinists, Lutherans, Armenians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Quakers, all indicating the absence, instead of subsistence of union between them. Should the apostle Paul now arise from the dead, and under a commission from his divine master, visit the churches of Christendom, what surprise would he not manifest at finding these discordant names among the professed disciples of his Lord! Would he not demand of us, as he did of the Corinthians in regard to their divisions, who is Calvin, other than a minister of Christ, that you call yourselves after his name, as though he were your master? What is Luther, more than any servant of the Lord, that you should take his name upon you? And who were Arminius and Wesley? Were they more than servants of the Lord, as you all ought to be? Are each of these men entitled to the same honour with Christ himself, that God's own people should be named after them, even as the disciples were first called Christians at Anti-

och, to denote their subjection to him? Is Christ divided? And how many Christ's have ye? Into how many fractions have ye divided your blessed Saviour? and into how many more will you yet divide him, before your divisions shall have an end? Know ye not that the church constitutes but one body, of which Christ himself is the head, and of which you are all members? Have ye not read in the Scriptures that there must be no divisions among you?

Were there room for any remaining doubt whether the division into sects is a violation of its constitutional unity, we might adduce further evidence, from a more particular consideration of the figures of speech, employed by the Saviour and his apostles, to express the unity of the church.

When our Lord represents himself as *the vine*, he represents his disciples as *the branches*. Hereby is expressed, not only an intimate union between himself as the vine and his disciples as the branches, but also, an intimate and inseparable union between the branches themselves. While the branches remain attached to the vine, they draw their nourishment from it, and each branch communicates of its support to all the rest; but by detaching one of the branches, its union with the vine and the other branches is destroyed, and its nourishment from the parent stock, and the benefit it receives from the other branches must cease. How absurd would be the idea, that this detached branch should still claim to derive its nourishment from the parent stock, and to be yet united to the other branches! Not less absurd is the idea, that a portion of the church, after it is detached from the rest by its formation into a distinct sect, should yet claim to be united to those from whom they are torn away.

Another figure employed to represent the unity of the church, as we have already had occasion to remark, is that of the human body composed of all its various members. There is an intimate union between all the parts of the body; the severance of one of the members is the destruction of that member, and mutilates the body. Between all the members too, there is a mutual dependence; one cannot say to the other, I have no need of thee; and when one suffers, the others also suffer with it, as is beautifully and strongly illustrated in the first epistle to the Corinthians, already referred to. It would be most absurd for the foot or any other member to insist on a severance from the body, because of a lack of harmony between it and the other members; and after its severance to claim that it still maintains its former union with the body. Equally absurd is it for any one or any number of believers to separate themselves from the church because of the want of union in feeling, mind, opinion, counsel or action between them and the other members of the church; and alike absurd is it that those who are thus separated should claim that they are, notwithstanding, still maintaining their union with those from whom they have been severed.

Again, believers are called the *family* of God on earth. A well ordered family will be harmonious in their feelings, views, plans, and actions. So long as it is the design of the institution, that a human family shall remain together, they will so remain, promoting each other's comfort and happiness, and qualifying the different members of it for the parts they are expected to act in life, after their retirement at the proper time, from the family circle. They do not separate for the reason that they cannot live together in peace and love. When-

ever a separation for this cause actually takes place, the design of the institution of families is subverted, the family loses its character, and is disgraced even in the eyes of the world. It was the design of God, clearly expressed in the Scriptures, that the church should always be one; that all Christians in every place should worship, pray, render thanksgiving and praise *together*, except only where numbers and distance of place prevent; that they should counsel and act together, for the salvation of sinners, for promoting the welfare of the whole family of believers, and qualifying each member for a place, which, after their removal from the family of the saints below, they hope to occupy in the family of God in heaven. There ought not to be a breaking up of the family of God's church for the reason that its members cannot harmonize together, and whenever such an event does in point of fact occur, the family is disgraced in the eye of God, forasmuch as they have subverted the constitution which he has himself ordained for his church.

Another expressive figure employed by the Holy Spirit in speaking of the church, is that of a *sheepfold.* Mark the expression, a *sheep* fold. Not an enclosure for dogs, wolves, or tigers, between whom it is necessary to build walls of great strength and height to keep them from biting, tearing, and destroying one another; but of harmless, peaceable sheep, that may safely be kept together in flocks, be they never so large, and which are divided into several folds, only for the purpose of supplying to them with more facility their food, and their other necessities and conveniences. And must it be confessed, that the sheep of Christ cannot live together in peace? Do they embody so much of the nature of the ferocious brute, as that the only means of preventing

one from destroying another, is to keep them at a safe distance? Even thieves and robbers can live in bands of brotherhood in the same den, with nothing but the tie of interest and common danger to keep them together. But the children of Christ's kingdom cannot live in a state of union, although they are exposed to hosts of common enemies, and all have the same everlasting interests, and ought to be bound in the same bond of love, and all the holy ties of religion. What a libel on the character of christianity! What a perverted exhibition of its nature and influence!

THE BOND OF UNION.

We have thus seen that God tolerates no divisions in his church, having constituted it one and indivisible. He well knew at the same time that the church was composed and would be composed of fallible men, who needed every guard and help to keep them in the bond of unity, and preserve them from the danger of schism. He has, therefore, given abundant directions in his holy word, to provide against this danger, and which, had they been obeyed, in the measure in which men have ability to obey them, would have preserved the unity of the church.

The *great principle* inculcated in the Scriptures for maintaining the unity of the church, *is love.*

God himself is love. The union between the believer and his Lord, is a union of love and confidence; and Christians are bound to live in love to each other in the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. The last command of the Saviour to his disciples was, that they should love one another. The apostle John declares the love of the brethren to be the great test of Christian character, and argues that it is wholly vain for a man to

pretend that he loves God, if he does not evince love for his brother. The exercise of love required among the members of God's family, is not merely an abstinence from hatred and hostility, but the exercise of affection, the feeling and manifestation of kindness, the desire of maintaining intercourse with each other; nay, of being together, counselling and acting together, honouring their master and head together, suffering together, rejoicing together, rendering thanksgiving together, worshipping and praying together, and holding communion together at the Lord's table.

The truth of all this will not be denied; but how, it will be asked, is this principle of love to be maintained, while there is so much in the infirmities, not to say vicious propensities of men to impair and expel it?

We answer that the great secret for the preservation of love in the church and in every other community, is *forbearance*. Where this duty is not religiously observed, love cannot long subsist among sinful mortals; but where the duty is recognised, appreciated and performed, love and unity will be maintained, until the offending party shall wholly forfeit his character as a member of the community, and not only authorize, but demand an expulsion.

The Scripture abounds in its requisitions of this duty of forbearance. The Lord Jesus Christ inculcates it, both by precept and example. He inculcates it *by precept*, in commanding his disciples to practice the mutual forgiveness of injuries, not only once, but an indefinite number of times; by diverting the attention of his followers more to the beam in their own eye, than to the mote in the eye of their brother; by cautioning against the exercise of a rash and uncharitable judgement of

others, by insisting on the duty of self denial, and in short, by the whole scope of his precepts and doctrines, relating to the intercourse of his disciples with each other. Our blessed Lord *practised* this duty of forbearance, personally, in his own family of disciples. None can fail to admire his patience with his disciples, in the exhibition of their pride and ambition; with their unreasonable request that he would advance them to the best stations in the temporal kingdom they expected he was about to set up; with their unbelief, so unaccountable to us, of his approaching death and resurrection, although plainly foretold by the prophets and expressly declared by himself, and with their total ignorance of even the meaning of the resurrection from the dead. How remarkable was his forbearance with their desertion of him in the hour of his extreme distress; with the denial of Peter, with the avarice of Judas, until his apostasy was manifest. And after all his experience of their unteachableness and imperfections, and with the knowledge of their approaching defection, how patiently and affectionately does he address them in the thirteenth and subsequent chapters of John's gospel, as though there had been no other concern in his bosom than to furnish them with matter of consolation, during the short period between his apprehension and his resurrection. All the time of his converse with the disciples, he indeed, faithfully reproved them for their faults, and instructed them as they were able to bear it; but he cherished them as members of his family, so long as they gave evidence of their love to God, and attachment to his cause.

Nor is there a lack of harmony on this topic, between the Saviour and his apostles. In the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts the saints

and the faithful, in all loveliness and meekness and long suffering, to forbear one another in love. The Colossian Christians he commends to put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ also forgave you. Col. iii. 12, 13.

The duty of forbearance is in the Scriptures expressly enjoined in matters of *opinion* as well as matters of practice. In the fourteenth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, Paul teaches as follows: "Him that is weak "in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. "For one believeth that he may eat all things, another "who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth "despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eat- "eth not, despise him that eateth, *for God hath received* "*him.* Who art thou that judgest another man's ser- "vant? To his own master he standeth or falleth; yea "he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him "stand. One man esteemeth one day above another, "another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man "be fully persuaded in his own mind. For why dost "thou judge thy brother, or why hast thou set at nought "thy brother? For we shall all stand at the judgement "seat of Christ."

Much as these texts are quoted and perverted by latitudinarians, they have notwithstanding, a meaning, and may not be stricken from the Bible. The application of them to our present point is very striking, when we consider that there were among the Christians at Rome, differences of opinion as to what food might or might not be lawfully eaten, and also, as to the observance of particular days. It is easy to perceive that these differen-

ces of opinion would introduce different practices in different congregations and in different families, as well as in different individuals of the same congregation and of the same family. What was eaten by the one, another condemned as unlawful; and he who refused to observe a particular day, was deemed disobedient to God's law by him who did observe it. With the spirit of contention these variances of judgement were calculated to break in upon brotherly love, and banish peace from every church and every family; being not merely disagreements on theoretical points of doctrine, but on matters which must directly influence the practice of the parties more or less every day. Should differences of this character arise among Christians at the present time, would they forbear with each other? No; they would separate into distinct sects almost as soon as the difference should be discovered. Why? Because we have so long been accustomed to the false doctrine of the lawfulness of divisions in the church, that we would overlook or disregard the enjoined duty of forbearance. But with the spirit of meekness, Christian love and forbearance, such differences may, in the opinion of the apostle (and he wrote by inspiration of God,) be endured, and notwithstanding such differences, families may remain together, and the church undivided. These points of controversy are not, indeed, the same with those which now divide the church into sects. Our divisions are upon rituals, upon government, and what are called questions of theology. But the law of forbearance extends to all matters of difference between Christians. No line of distinction is drawn in the Scriptures, nor does reason require or admit that there should be any. The ground of the duty, as stated by the apostle, is that

no man shall assume to be master of another. If I may not be the lord of your *actions*, by what process of reasoning can it be shown that I may lord it over your *understanding*. If the church must forbear with the wrong conduct or practice of a member, conscientiously believed by him to be in accordance with the Scriptures, why should she not bear with the wrong opinion of a member which he conscientiously judges to be drawn from the Bible?

Let us not be understood as denying the right of individuals or the church, to condemn opinions plainly contrary to the Word of God and of fundamental importance. On this point there is no dispute among Christians. Our object is to exhibit the duty of forbearance, as taught in the Scriptures, and to prove that it is to be exercised in regard to matters of opinion, as well as to matters of practice and ritual observances. We are aware that much more importance is attributed to correctness of theological opinions, than to correctness of moral behaviour. This is an error which has probably arisen from the prominence given to points of theology in the controversies which have been carried on between the various denominations of Christians. The idea is not countenanced in the Scriptures, nor is it supported by the principles of reason. It is highly important that Christians should form correct opinions, and that they should pursue a correct course of conduct. The argument that opinions are most important because they influence our practice, is not a solid one. While the fact that our opinions have more or less influence on our conduct is admitted, we deny the conclusion that opinions are therefore the most important. Our practice goes as far to form our principles, as our opinions go to

determine our practice. A man of corrupt principles will exhibit them in his practice, and a man of corrupt behaviour will form corrupt opinions. No man can be too careful to form correct opinions *for himself* of what is taught in the Bible, and no man can be too careful to conform his own life to its requirements. We ought to love our neighbour sufficiently to desire that *his* opinions and conduct may be according to the standard of truth and holiness. We may not tolerate in ourselves any erroneous opinion or conduct. We must exercise forbearance towards our brother in many an opinion and practice, which in our belief is erroneous. This is fully shown in the directions of the apostle Paul in the verses above quoted from the fourteenth chapter of Romans; and his reasoning is as conclusive as his doctrine is plain; namely, that one brother has no right to lord it over another. Nor has any number of brethren whether congregated in a church, or in whatever relation they stand, any more right to exercise dominion over one man's conscience in matters of opinion and practice. Numbers have more power than an individual, but the duty of forbearance is as incumbent upon a church as upon an individual. Nay, the command is expressly given by the apostle to the churches.

We speak of the duty of forbearance, as it is to be exercised towards Christians, members of the church. Those who err, may and ought to be instructed, admonished, exhorted, reproved, or warned according to the directions abundantly given in the Holy Scriptures; but so long as they, in the judgement of charity, may be deemed Christians, there is no warrant to expel them from the church, unless it may be in those cases of error

which strike at its foundations. It is time that every error, whether of opinion or practice, may have a tendency more or less direct or remote to weaken the church, and if countenanced, may in the end subvert it. Yet there is a wide difference between one error and another, as is evident from the Scriptures, and the dictates of reason. Every error is not alike injurious. There is none that may be countenanced; there are many that must be tolerated, or the principles of forbearance must be abandoned. There are errors which are in their character fundamental, or essential, and there are those of minor importance. The dividing line between them it may, in some instances, not be very easy to trace with accuracy; yet such a line of distinction actually does exist, and was doubtless more clearly seen in the primitive ages, when the church remained entire, than it now is; and will again be as clearly discerned when the spirit of unity shall have taken up his abode in the church, and Christians shall have returned to the practice of love and forbearance. Even now, under the dominion of sect, there are many who are so far deliverd from its power, as that they would have little difficulty in practice, to draw the line between errors that are essential, and those which are not essential; and the facility of discovering in the Scriptures, the mind of the spirit on this subject, will increase, as the spirit of division shall die away.

Although this chapter is here brought to a close, much remains to be said upon the proposition therein maintained, namely, that division into sects is a breach

of the constitutional union of the church. The argument is resumed under several of the subsequent heads, or rather, it is continued throughout the greater part of the work.

CHAPTER II.

THE EVILS OF SECT.

1. *It banishes love and peace.* 2. *Cherishes pride.* 3. *Multiplies false professors of religion.* 4. *It keeps men from the proper reading of the Bible.* 5. *It perpetuates errors in doctrine, and prevents reformation in practice.* 6. *It encourages and strengthens opposers of religion.* 7. *Retards the latter day of glory.* 8. *Weakens and destroys the church,* wasting its resources of money and men. — A house divided against itself cannot stand. — Reference to political parties, and to an army. — Testimony of ecclesiastical history. — Satan, in warring against the church, acts on the maxim "divide and conquer."

It was to be expected that the violation of a principle which God has inculcated with so much anxiety, and guarded with so much pains as the unity of the church, would be followed with lamentable consequences, either as a punishment upon his part for the breach of his law and constitution, or as a necessary result of a departure from the order which he had established to preserve her peace, comfort, and prosperity. God knew the value of union among his followers in this wicked world, and the evils which would surely follow, if they should ever

be seduced into the snare of sectarian divisions. We will not attempt to make a perfect enumeration of the evils of sect, nor can we adequately expose their injurious and ruinous character; but will endeavour to make such an exhibition as to vindicate the wisdom of God in ordaining that his church should be one and indivisible.

Let it be understood that when we make use of the word sect, it is not designed as a name of reproach, nor as applicable to one denomination of Christians more than to another. We intend to apply the name indiscriminately to every division of the church into distinct denominations.

We now proceed to consider the evils which have resulted from sectarian divisions.

1. *It banishes peace and love, while it cherishes hatred and contention among Christians.*

Contention is the parent of division, and happy would it be for the Christian world, had the birth of the progeny been followed by the death of the progenitor, or even mitigated his fury, or weakened his arm. If, after a division had taken place, the disputants and their adherents would be content with the victory always claimed on both sides, and enjoy the fruits of it in peace, without further disturbing the other party and the rest of the Christian world, we might hope to see an end to the contention. But such is not the result. Each party has its zeal inflamed instead of diminished by the schism that has rent the body asunder; and each is fully persuaded of the absolute necessity of vindicating the justice of its own side of the question. And thus is continued between them a war of words and feeling, in the conducting of which the parties are not very conscientious in the choice of weapons, often preferring such

as inflict the most incurable wounds upon the opponent. This increases the fury of the contest, and perpetuates it from generation to generation. How often has persecution to imprisonment, confiscation of property, banishment, and even death, been the lot of one of the contending parties, while the other has exultingly raised the shout of triumph! At this day indeed, at least in this land of freedom, the arm of civil power is no longer put forth to crush religious opponents; but most of the evils of contention are continued to the present time. The gentleness inculcated in the Scriptures is superseded by the spirit of arrogance and rude rebuke; candour by disingenuousness, and love by the indulgence of hatred.

The animosities produced by divisions in the church are not healed by time. The same disputes which arose three centuries ago, between Luther and Calvin, with respect to the eucharist, are kept alive between their respective followers to the present time. The controversy between the Arminians and the adherents to the synod of Dort, is now carried on with the same zeal, if not with the same bitterness, as when the original combatants were living; and each party is as positive as they were then, of being in the right. The Baptist controversy is quite as stubborn at this day, as it was at the commencement; and the questions on church government so long controverted between the kirk of Scotland and the Seceders, and between the church of England and the dissenters, are as far from being settled as they were when the disputes first arose. Not only are the ancient divisions maintained, and the contests between them continued, but new schisms are occurring. Most, if not all the great denominations, are

involved in controversies among themselves, carried on with more or less of bitterness and intolerance; some of them have recently been actually torn apart, and others are threatened with the same calamity. The work of contention and separation is still in progress; and when or how it will terminate, must be left to the disposer of all events to disclose, or the event to declare. We see not why it will not continue until every man will be obliged to build his own church and maintain his own priest, unless the friends of Christ shall open their eyes to see the unscriptural and destructive character of all divisions, and with repentance for past errors, seek to return into one fold under one shepherd, according to the original constitution of the church of God.

Hereby shall all men know, says the Saviour, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. Alas! how has this mark of Christian character been blotted out! By the divisions among Christians continued and multiplied, the love of the brethren, inculcated with so much solicitude by Christ and his apostles, is well nigh become a stranger and an exile from the earth. The peace of civil society is broken by the discord and contests which prevail among the disciples of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Every neighbourhood is infected with the spirit of contention which is raging, and the unholy passions which excite and are excited by it. Neighbours, with averted eyes, meet each other, moving in opposite directions to and from different places of worship. In social visits, religion may not be the theme of conversation among Christians, lest the peace of the company be broken by the expression of sentiments at variance with the sectarian principles of some one or

more of their number. Even the family, in which if any where, religion might expect to have a welcome and a resting place, is divided against itself. The wife cannot sit at the same communion table with her husband, nor go to the same place of worship. The children who have become members of the church, have perhaps attached themselves to denominations distinct from each other and from those of their parents, and not any two of the family can consistently attend the same sanctuary. The base mention of a religious subject would be the signal for hostilities, and therefore all pious conversation must be excluded, as the only means of avoiding a breach of the peace. Family instruction is neglected, because the faith of the father cannot be endured by the rest of the household; and family worship is dispensed with, because it cannot be performed with union of feeling. And thus a Christian family which ought to be the abode of peace, love, and unity, is converted by the power of sect into a habitation of discord, alienation of heart, confusion and irreligion.

The world are witnesses of this want of love among Christians. Nay, they see that the contrary principle of enmity is predominant. Where is the wonder that sinners are hardened and fortified in their impenitence and unbelief?

2. *It cherishes the spirit of pride and self-preference.*

There is perhaps no denomination but which, itself being judge, has its faith the most pure, its standards the most excellent, its discipline the most perfect, its government the most scriptural, or its people the most pious. The lovers of sect are fond of comparisons, and are sure to place themselves above all others in the knowledge or practice of the truth, glorying more in

being Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, Burghers or Covenanters, that in the grand truths and principles of the gospel, in which Christians generally are agreed. In the proportion that they prefer their own sect to every others, they of course ascribe the more wisdom and goodness to themselves for having discovered the superiority of that denomination with which they have chosen to unite. This is the spirit of pride and self-preference which the apostle reprobated in the Corinthians who boasted "I am of Paul," and "I am of Apollos." There is no difficulty in discovering this spirit and perceiving its unbecoming character in those who belong to a different party from our own; but who will acknowledge that the same principle is eating out the vitals of his own piety, and is rendering himself as much the subject of odium and pity to others, as they are to him?

3. *It fills the church with unworthy members.*

Such is the eagerness of contending sects to secure additions to their numbers, that a man can scarcely exhibit a sober countenance before he is noticed and marked out as a subject of speedy enlistment into the ranks of the opposing armies. He is invited and caressed from various quarters in such a manner as to afford grounds of fear to a more experienced observer that the parties are quite as anxious to bring the awakened sinner into *their* church, as to lead him to the Saviour. His doubts whether he be as yet a Christian are soon removed by the attentions he receives, and by the officious and hasty advice which is given him. The zealous of each sect beset him with their arguments and persuasions, and he is soon made acquainted with the errors of every sect, while probably he hears little of the

truths of any. He believes he ought to make a public profession of his faith; and at the commencement of his course, he is compelled by the urgency of his assailants to enter upon a task to which he is wholly incompetent — namely, to decide upon the comparative merits of the various denominations whose claims may have been presented to him. He is constrained to decide in a short time upon questions of great depth and intricacy which require the labour of years and maturity of Christian experience to comprehend and determine. And after he has, in his own apprehension, solved every difficulty, while he may have become very learned in questions of rituals, church government, and the doctrines which are controverted among Christians, perhaps he knows very little of the Bible as a whole, or of those great and essential truths in which the great body of believers are agreed. He may, by this process, become very expert in the peculiarities of his own sect, while he has made little or no progress in the knowledge of Christ, the cultivation of a proper temper, or the formation of a Christian character. Such of our readers as have had opportunities of witnessing the movements of religious partisans, cannot have failed to observe that multitudes are hurried into a profession of religion or into a state of trial in a particular church, lest they might be caught in the trap of some other denomination.

How many false and unworthy members are thus electioneered into the church, is known to God alone. No doubt there are many. And could she afterwards be purified from this mass of unwholesome materials, the evil would be comparatively trifling in its character. Where there is only one denomination, this process is

to a great degree very free from danger. But where there is more than one, how often is the exercise of discipline wholly neglected through the fear that it will give umbrage to the offender, and drive him to add the weight of his name, property or influence to another denomination! And thus the misconduct of many remains unreproved, and the whole body becomes corrupted by the unchristian practices of its members, winked at by the church.

Besides, it is a common occurrence for a church member to change the place of his residence. If he does not find in the place to which he removes a church of his own sect, however well it may be supplied with those of another name, his sectarian feelings do not permit him to put himself under the watchful care of any of these, and he lives as a sheep without a shepherd. His sectarian prejudices, moreover, may prevent him from feeling the obligation to attend a place of public worship where there is none of his own persuasion; and he may even be deterred from it by the fear (laudable among sectarians) of being seduced from the purity of the faith and practice of his own church, and thus live a heathen in the midst of a Christian community.

By all these different means unworthy professors of religion are greatly multiplied, causing such an amalgamation of the church with the world, as to render it impossible to distinguish between the wheat and the chaff. The church is groaning, being sorely burdened under the oppressive load.

4. *It disqualifies men for the proper reading of the Scriptures.*

The injuries suffered by individual church members from the causes mentioned under the last head, might

be alleviated and in time removed, had they been taught and influenced to search the Scriptures, and place upon them their principal reliance for instruction and guidance. The word of the Lord is the bread of life to every Christian soul, and all the other means of grace have their principal use in exciting the believer to read the Bible aright. The manner in which it is to be read and studied is indeed sufficiently indicated in the Bible itself; but such is man's unteachableness and reluctance to obey, that he needs the living minister to exhort, admonish, explain the truth, and to enforce it upon the heart and conscience. He needs also other means, and the Scriptures when constantly and prayerfully read, will lead him to seek those helps, not only as the appointed means of his own improvement, but as the appointed mode of pleasing God.

The church of Rome withholds the Bible from the laity; and their clergy, for the most part, deny the use of it to themselves. It is the glory of the protestant church that she makes it the duty of every one, ministers and people, to search the Scriptures; and it is the glory of the present age that protestant Christians have resolved to furnish the sacred volume to every family in the world. But although we have the Bible and esteem it of great price, it by no means follows that we derive from it all the benefit which the proper use of it would insure.

The truth is far otherwise. It is the evident design of its author that the Bible should be read daily, to furnish the food of which the soul of the Christian stands in continual need; that it should be read again and again, not only that it may be understood and remembered, but that by the frequent and constant perusal of

its pages, men may expose themselves to the fulness of its moral influence; that it should be the subject of our meditations by day and by night; and that it should be studied with prayer to God for his enlightening and sanctifying influence. It is moreover the plain will of God that the *whole* of the Bible should thus be read, since all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable; and that each part should receive that degree of attention which its intrinsic importance demands, and that particular portions of the sacred volume should not so engross our attention as to prevent us from setting a due value on the other portions of the same word of truth.

This obvious and profitable use of the Holy Scriptures has been subverted by the operation of sectarian principles. An undue prominence has been given to those points of doctrine on which believers are at variance, while the mass of valuable instructions contained in the Bible, and which are not the subjects of controversy among Christians, are cast into the shade, possessing comparatively little interest in the estimation of the sectarian reader. This false taste and injurious habit is in great measure cherished, if not formed, by the polemical character of the preaching in the divided protestant church. From many pulpits you may hear more sermons on controverted subjects, than on all others taken together; and the love of controversy being natural to the hearts of fallen man, this description of sermons is very grateful to the great majority of hearers. Indeed many *Christians* will not be satisfied with any but doctrinal sermons; and they would scarcely recognise those as doctrinal, which are not controversial. While their minister is demonstrating the errors

of those who differ from the standards of his church, and his hearers are wondering at the blindness and perverseness of their opponents, they forget that in a neighbouring church followers of the same Saviour, but hearers of another preacher, are at the same moment indulging in pious wonder at the dulness of *their* understandings. How can it be expected that Christians under this species of training will read the word of God "without partiality." The truth is that by many the Bible is read more with the view to defend the tenets of their own sect, and refute those of their antagonists, than simply to inquire what is the will of the Lord revealed to the reader. How much is the fact to be deplored that the Holy Bible designed by its wise author to light every step in the path of the Christian through this evil world, should be so perverted as to lead the reader into the darkness of unprofitable controversy with his fellow pilgrims; and that the book of God designed to teach and inculcate the love of peace and unity, should be perused in such a spirit as to supply to the reader aliment for contention and breach of charity.

Were Christians taught and induced to read the Scriptures daily, to read the entire Scriptures, with humble prayer for light from above, they would not fail to exhibit a more consistent Christian character. For their minds would then come into frequent contact with every part of God's word, and in due season would they receive the portion they need. Every blemish, every fault, every unholy feeling and practice would receive its seasonable reproof from God himself, speaking in his word. Every duty would be held up to the view of the Christian, with the arguments and motives for its performance. God's character and his own would be con-

stantly presented to his consideration, and the claims which his fellow Christians have upon his forbearance and his love could not be forgotten and neglected. But the impartial reading and study of the Bible can never be expected to be pursued by Christians, so long as they are taught to attach so much comparative importance to subjects of controversy. These will continue to engross their minds and affections, while the "weightier matters" of the Bible will be either hastily read, or entirely passed over as dry and uninteresting.

It is so in politics. A single topic, however unimportant in itself, will, when made the subject of dispute between the political partisans of the nation, assume more importance in the eyes of the community, and receive more of the attention than all the other concerns of the country about which there is no existing controversy.

5. *It frustrates every effort to reform what is wrong in the church.*

In the first place, the division of the church into distinct sects *perpetuates errors in doctrine.* Though none of the sects may be unwilling to acknowledge that in their own creed or confession of faith there is a single error, they will readily admit that errors abound among Christians of other denominations. What but differences of opinion among Christians have divided the church? One or more points of doctrine affirmed on one side, and denied on the other, has given rise to the various sects which have rent the church in pieces; and nothing can be clearer than that one of the parties are supporting error, where their sentiments are in direct opposition to each other. We do not maintain that if there were an amalgamation of all sects, there would be

no errors broached in the church; but we do hold and are confident that the surest way to perpetuate any error, is to encourage or drive one of the disagreeing parties to form itself into a separate denomination. If the party seceding be wrong, the error will be adhered to as long as the sect shall subsist; and if the party seceded from be wrong, the error will be persevered in until the denomination shall become extinct; because in either case the point of difference will introduce a new article into their respective creeds, and of that article they will be as tenacious as every Christian ought to be of the Bible itself. This assertion is fully verified by history.

How are the errors which are now incorporated into the creeds, confessions or systems of different denominations, ever to be purged from the church in its present state of division? Who is to commence the work? Who dares to undertake the task of pointing out the errors of his own denomination? If such a man could be found, he would instantly be denounced and silenced as the enemy of his church, or a traitor to his party. He could not expect and would not meet with a kinder reception than Jesus Christ himself received from the Jewish church, when he exposed their departure from the truth of God, as declared in the Scriptures. If the error may not be exposed by a member of the same denomination, how can it be supposed that any interference will be listened to when coming from one of another sect? All history and observation proves that no church has ever yielded to the force of arguments, however strong, coming from an opponent.

When, however, the church shall be again united, one of the greatest obstacles to the discovery and acknowledgement of error will be removed, and as there will then

be no opposing sects to keep alive party pride, passion and prejudice, such as may be honestly desirous of knowing the truth, may with perfect safety, without the danger of persecution or reproach, yield themselves unreservedly to the teaching of the Holy Spirit through his own word. They will avail themselves of the history of the past, and the discussions that have already been had of perhaps every point of doctrine contained in the Bible; and as there will then be no longer any sense of disgrace in the acknowledgement that we know nothing as we ought to know, men will readily renounce their past opinions, when the force of sound argument shall prove them to have been unscriptural. And then it will be seen and admitted that truth and error have been mingled in the creed of every sect, and the watchmen on the walls of Zion will begin to see eye to eye.

As the division of the church into opposing sects forbids the hope of eradicating any error of doctrine that finds a place in the creed of any denomination, so it is the capital engine of Satan, the arch enemy, to *prevent any reformation of practice.* The protestant church in its infant and undivided state, entered with a noble spirit upon the work of reformation, diffusing in a short period of time, much of the light and holy influence of true Christianity. She unhappily became afterwards the theatre of theological controversy, which, owning to the bad spirit in which their disputes were conducted, resulted more in the excitement of unholy passions, than in producing conviction of the truth, or the prevalence of Christian feeling. The consequence was a separation of the contending parties, and the formation of distinct churches, each claiming to be the true church of Christ. A division once commenced, it was

comparatively easy to produce subdivisions, until in process of time, it was almost a matter of course for a difference of opinion to produce a new denomination. And these unholy divisions have ever since been multiplying, so that every age has furnished the addition of many names in the dictionary of religious sect. Amidst the strife which these controversies and schisms have kept alive, it was to be expected that each sect would find ample employment for all the means in their power to sustain their own existence. And such has been the fact. They could scarcely have found time, and they have evinced little inclination to reform abuses in the church, or to bring the world under the influence of the gospel. To prove this assertion, we will adduce one or two examples.

The slave trade, now so justly abhorred by all enlightened men, could not have become the legalized business of protestant Christians, and been openly and shamelessly pursued by them for the space of two centuries, had the church been bound together in the bond of Christian love and unity. The early leaders of the Society of Friends protested against the traffic, and boldly proclaimed it to be contrary to the principles of the gospel, and a gross violation of Christian duty; but the practical belief of the doctrine was diffused only through the limits of that denomination. By the rest it was unheeded or treated with indifference, as the tenet of a sect, instead of being received as a Christian principle, which ought to be felt and acted upon by every member of the church of Christ. So likewise the practice of drinking distilled liquors was seen, by the primitive Quakers and by John Wesley in his time, to be dangerous, injurious and unchristian; but the truth

of this sentiment was heeded only by the Quakers and the Methodists, while the members of other religious denominations have made, sold and consumed the poisons of the still as freely and openly as if they had been the waters of life. Had the church been united in one body of Christian brethren, the light which was confined within the narrow bounds of two Christian sects, would, like the candle of the Lord, have shone upon the whole of the protestant church, and ere this, upon the rest of the world.

The principles of the reformation from popery would long since have effected the spread of the gospel through the whole earth, had they not been checked in their operation, for they were the principles of the Bible, which commands the disciples of Christ to preach the gospel to every creature. But alas! the church has found other employment. The spirit of discord having broken out among her children, the powers of the church have been wasted in controversies and persecutions, instead of being employed in evangelizing the world. The Moravian brethren, it is true, have done something towards the propagation of Christianity abroad, for more than a century past; but the other denominations seem scarcely to have been apprized of their operations; or if they were, they were not moved to follow the good example. It was the example only of a sect, and the force of it was lost upon the others, and they kept aloof from the holy work with as much indifference as though the "Brethren" had been engaged in an enterprise which concerned only themselves. There is not and there cannot be the feeling of a common interest between different sects. It is of the nature of division to destroy the community of feeling. What

one sect is doing, unless it be to aggrandize itself at the expense of the others, seems to attract little attention; so that a reformation in any particular, remains confined to the denomination in which it originates, and the others remain as unconcerned in relation to it, as they would be respecting the movements among themselves of any of the different castes in India.

The cause of benevolence has, it is true, of late excited something like a general interest in some of the churches, notwithstanding existing divisions, and has made some progress in spite of the dominion of sect. It had reposed in the slumber of ages, until a principle has recently manifested itself, which, if not resisted, will eventuate in the reunion of the church of Christ. It is in fact the principle of union itself, drawing together the warm hearts of divers denominations, who forgetting minor subjects of difference, unite in a combined effort to ameliorate the condition of man and to advance the interests of Christ's kingdom. The same principle has originated foreign missions, as well as domestic missions, the Bible Society, the Sabbath School Union, the Prison Discipline and Seaman's Friend Society, the Tract and Education Societies. The spirit which had started into life these noble institutions, emphatically the glory of the present age, will, if left to its own operation, sustain them, and bear them on to a happy consummation; but it is well known to those who are conversant with the concerns of these benevolent enterprises, that the power of sect, however it may in some instances be disguised, is already set in array against them; and unless that power of sect shall be broken, or its character essentially changed, the opposition maintained by it against the cause of reform, will be protracted and severe.

The resistance so strongly manifested to the progress of moral improvement, has, by a vigorous writer of the day, been aptly personified under the name of "the genius of the existing order of things." This evil genius is every where employed with watchful care, exerting his utmost power and skill to keep the world in its present condition of wretchedness, guarding the "celestial empire" against the invasion of Christianity, fortifying the Musselman in the faith of the prophet and his koran. He is the privy counsellor of the despots and tyrants of the earth, instructing them to shut out from their vassals the light of knowledge, and to quench the flame of liberty. He stands at the church door of every sect, crying danger! at the suggestion of any improvement or reformation, lest they may lose their distinctive peculiarities, and fail of showing the same features which they have exhibited for ages past. Dreading the spirit of reformation, which seems to be partially kindling in the protestant world, the malignant genius is constantly vociferating, "Let things remain as they are, lest they become worse." The sentiment is re-echoed by every sect, and the man who dares to propose any alteration in the doctrine, government, discipline, or practice of his own denomination, does it at the peril of being charged with disaffection to his own church. This accounts for the fact which will be readily admitted by all, that a man, whether preacher, ruler, or private member, cannot be a favourite in his own sect, unless he be thorough-going in defending every one of its tenets, rites, ceremonies, and regulations, and in opposing every attempt to change the existing order of things. A man of liberal principles may be popular in other denominations, where he has little or no power of doing good; but he

is sure to be very unpopular in his own connexion, where he might exert a beneficial influence, were not his attempts at improvement resisted and baffled by the power of sectarian bigotry, pride, and prejudice.

6. *It gives courage and strength to opposers.*

The enemies to true religion are close observers of the movements of the church, and especially do they notice its divisions. The history of sects, not only the more public, but even the secret movements of the contending parties are subject to the cognizance of their keen penetration; and where is the wonder that they should discover much to the reproach of Christians, as well as to the confirmation of their own unbelief and hatred of religion? The various differences and contentions among the advocates of Christianity, their divisions into sects almost innumerable, with the rage of party strife between them, and even their persecutions of each other, come most powerfully to the aid of the depraved heart, in rejecting the holy truths of the Bible, which they do not relish, and which they are conscious they do not obey. If Christianity were exhibited in its native light by those who believe it, it would go far towards conquering the power of the infidel to disbelieve; while now as the exhibition of the Christian character appears to his eye, instead of removing, it corroborates his infidelity.

Were it not for the deplorable divisions among Christians, the fatal heresies which from time to time are broached, would receive no countenance in the world. The heretic would find no place where to set his foot in the church; for he would be cut off as a rotten member, and there would be no sect to receive him. The harmonious worship, faith, and Christian practice of the united church would keep the wolves out of the sheepfold, and

they would then have to wander alone in the wilderness; or if they should attempt to collect a few followers, and assume the name of a church, the deception would, in most instances, be too apparent to deceive even the unwary. But now, amidst the multitude of denominations, all claiming to be the fold of Christ, and at least some of them exhibiting a character very different from that of peaceable and harmless sheep, is it matter of wonder that the Unitarian, the Universalist, the Roman Catholic, and the Mormonite, should confidently claim to be Christian churches, and be enabled, under the guise of religion, to do the work of their Master to more effect than could be done by their open opposition?

These enemies of religion would not be able to sustain their courage, did they see the friends of Christ acting in unison to extend the interests of his kingdom. All their efforts would be confined to deeds of darkness, as they would fail to find a place of safety in the light of day; and should they presume to present an open front of opposition, the moral power of the united church would speedily subdue them.

7. *It retards the latter day of glory.*

The sooner the church is reunited, the sooner may we expect the commencement of that happy period to which the friends of Christ are looking with joyful anticipations, when all shall know the Lord, from the greatest to the least; when righteousness and peace shall every where abound, and the Saviour's reign be established upon the earth. The victory over Satan might long since have been won, had not the soldiers of the cross made war upon each other, instead of uniting in a vigorous and persevering warfare against the common enemy.

The spirit of sect is at variance with the progress of holiness. Piety will not grow in the midst of envy, prejudice, party pride, hatred, strife and contention, narrow mindedness, bigotry, opposition to the progress of truth and reformation, under whose influence the light of Christianity is hidden under a bushel, and the salt has lost its savour. The degree of Christian perfection which the Scriptures teach us to be attainable, will not be exhibited by believers under all the demoralizing influences of sect; and in consequence, there will not be that exhibition of Christian character, which must ultimately be the great means under the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, to convert a world lying in wickedness.

Independently of these considerations, there is a tendency in the prevalence of sectarian divisions, to cripple all the other means for evangelizing the world, and bringing nominal Christians more fully under the influence of the gospel. The sectarian cannot admit the thought that the happy day of the church will arrive until the world is prepared to receive the doctrines, government, and rites of his own church. He is therefore reluctant, yea, and opposed to aid those general associations of Christians whose object is to extend the kingdom of Christ without regard to sect. To send the gospel to the heathen he may admit to be the duty of every Christian, but he has no heart to aid the board of foreign missions, unless he can be assured that they will propagate his own creed among the heathen. He cannot open his purse to the home missionary society, because he has no security that they will employ missionaries of his own party. He will not support the Sabbath School Union, because its conductors will not

promise to have his own catechism taught to the children; nor can he contribute to the funds of the American Education Society, because they may bring some men into the ministry who will not advance the interests of his own sect. The cause of seamen and prisons has no charms for him, not having any peculiar tendency to strengthen his own denomination. We are sorry to add that judging from the actions of multitudes of sectarians, there is reason to fear they would rather see the present state of things in the world continued, than to have the kingdom of Christ extended by associations of Christians who do not enter into *their* peculiar views and partialities. When can the world become evangelized under the prevalence of this narrow minded policy? Each sect is withholding its aid, until itself shall have acquired the power to accomplish the great work of converting the world. But none of them will ever possess this power. The only hope of effecting this great and glorious work, is the decline and ultimate fall of the empire of sect. It requires the united hearts, hands, purses, and prayers of protestant Christians to evangelize the heathen, convert the Jew to the faith of Christ, to purge the Greek and Latin churches from their corruptions, to bring sinners at home to repentance, and bring Christians under the full influence of the gospel.

The work to be done is great, almost beyond comprehension. The opposition and difficulties in the way are numerous and appalling. Were every Christian in the world employed in accomplishing it, yet how arduous would be the work, and how much time must it consume, what calamities must first be endured by the church, and what millions drop into the everlasting

abodes of the damned! How exceedingly lamentable, then, that those who are to perform the work, should voluntarily or ignorantly diminish the amount and efficiency of their resources, by jealousies, feuds, and divisions!

But upon the supposition that notwithstanding the retarding influence of sect, the cause of foreign missions should progress, and that the missionary establishments of the different denominations should extend the bounds of their present stations, until they shall come in contiguity to each other, what will be the result? Will each occupy his ground in peace, and assign territorial limits to the location of Episcopacy, Methodism, Baptism, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism? Or will the parties, as they come into contact, act over again the same scene of contention, persecution, and malevolence, in every form which has been acted in Europe and the United States? Or rather, instead of deferring the commencement of hostilities until the bounds of their missionary stations shall meet, will not the spirit of proselytism goad on the different sects to establish missions in places already occupied by others, and so commence the war of sect without much longer delay?

In any event, how long can it be, before christianized heathens will hear of our divisions and strifes? And what will be the effect of this information upon the converts? What upon the unconverted? What will be the feelings of our missionaries, when their disciples inquire of them the meaning of our fierce disputings and schisms? It may, upon the whole, be a happy providence for the heathen that they know so little of the church in Christian lands. Should the spirit of brotherly love now descend upon us, and reunite the church, the

converts among the heathen, when they learn the history of Christian sects, would hear it as the record of a period past, and of an evil removed, and from which the church had learned the curse of division and the blessings of union; and *they* might escape the snare into which *we* have fallen. But let them become acquainted with the controversies in the church from which they received the gospel, while these are actually agitating and distracting us, what can be expected but that the war of sect will at once break out among them? And who can calculate how long and to what degree they will be doomed to experience its bitterness, and how many centuries the latter day of glory may be retarded? May the Lord in his mercy deliver the heathen from the evils of division. May they know Christianity only in its benign, peaceful, sanctifying, and all its heavenly influences.

8. *It weakens and tends to destroy the church.*

This operation and tendency is manifest in many ways. The divisions of the church are *wasting its resources*, both of money and men.

Almost every denomination feels the necessity of having its theological school, although perhaps not more than a dozen of students are found in it at the same time, and this school must have its library, and as many professors as one that instructs two hundred students. Some deem it quite important to have also their sectarian college, and even their sectarian academy, to educate their youth, with the view to transfer them afterwards to their own theological seminary. To sustain these institutions, there must be agents and a complicated and expensive machinery for obtaining the funds necessary to defray the original cost and the continual expenditures. Each

denomination thinks it also quite essential to have also its newspaper, magazine, and books, to diffuse intelligence of its operations, and to defend and promote the peculiarities of its faith and practice. Several of these theological seminaries, colleges, and academies, newspapers and magazines, might be united in one, without the loss of any real advantage, and to the saving of an immense waste of money, and of the precious time of a host of instructers and editors.

Every denomination must also be at the expense of having its preacher, and of building, repairing, and furnishing its church, and perhaps a lecture room besides; so that it is not uncommon in compact settlements, to have four or five places of worship, with as many preachers of the gospel, to accommodate four or five hundred hearers, who might all, with much profit in every point of view, meet at one place, and enjoy the ministry of one man. On the other hand, in sparse and poor settlements, it is in many instances impossible to support public worship, for the sole reason that a sufficient number of Christians of the same denomination cannot be found to defray the expense; and consequently the population in such places rapidly become heathens in a Christian land; while if those among them who value the gospel, would only disregard the petty distinctions which keep them apart, they might enjoy all the privileges of the Christian religion, and be bringing up Christian, instead of heathen families.

We do not complain that too much money is expended for the support of the gospel. The people of this country have ample means, even under the wasteful expenditure induced by our sectarian divisions, to sustain the institutions of religion at home, including the supply of

the destitute in our new settlemens or elsewhere; but it grieves us to reflect that so much is wasted when the whole is needed. For all the money which the people are willing or can be persuaded to cast into the treasury of the Lord, there is urgent need to print and distribute Bibles and tracts, to promote sabbath schools, to support the cause of foreign and domestic missions, of seamen and of prisons; institutions which some in almost all the denominations of Christians are hailing as the harbingers of the latter day glory. But how can it be expected that these benevolent associations will be sustained with a liberality in any degree adequate to the exigency of the times, so long as the support of public worship at home is made many times more expensive than it need be.

Consider also the prodigious *waste of men*. Should a correct computation be made of the waste of men, caused by the division of the church into sects, the result would doubtless surprise even those who have been in the habit of mourning over this waste as an evil. We ask, can the church afford such a waste? The truth is, that educated men of piety, are scarce. The world needing many times more than it possesses, to answer all the purposes of benevolence, and there is a great deficiency even to supply the wants of our own country. How great then is the pity that such multitudes should be stationed where one half their number would do all their profitable business as well; and how much more is it to be lamented that a host of talented men should be employed in building and repairing partition walls, which the interests of the church require to be demolished.

But besides the wasteful expenditure of men and money, there are other tendencies in the division of the

church to impair its energies and eventually to bring it to destruction. The Saviour himself recognised the truth of the sentiment that divisions weaken and destroy, for he says, Matt. xii. 25, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city and house divided against itself shall not stand." On what possible ground the *church* should be exempted from the operation of a principle applicable to all other communities, we are at a loss to imagine.

Let us advert to its operation in politics. There are in all free governments two parties, one of them supporting, and the other opposing the administration. When one of these parties fall into controversy among themselves, and become rent into two or more divisions, does that party gain or lose strength by it? Without doubt its strength is impaired by the division. In regard to the subject of religion, there are also two parties, its friends and its opposers. Would the friends of religion be encouraged by learning that infidels, Roman Catholics, Unitarians, and all the other opposers of the cause of Christ, had united under one name, and are acting under the same counsels and with one heart in opposition to the truth of God? And would our opposers rejoice, or would they tremble to see Christians cease from their contentions, healing their divisions, and uniting in one brotherhood, to bring the world to the obedience of the gospel?

The church is represented as engaged in a warfare with its enemies. To wage war, it is necessary that there be two opposing armies. One of these armies we will suppose to have no other divisions than convenience requires, each division, regiment, battalion, and company acting under the command of one general in chief;

the other army is divided into separate bands, all professing indeed to be on the same side, but each wholly independent of the other, and of course choosing its own time and mode of operations. Which of those two armies, assuming them to be equal in numbers and skill, would combine the greatest strength? We need not wait for an answer. The church has been very improperly compared by the apologists for sect to the host of the children of Israel beautifully divided into tribes, each acting under its own prince and under its own banner, and marching to the conquest of Canaan. But these tribes were led by one commander, and were moved by one soul; and independence, jealousy, contention, and discord were not inscribed on the banner of each, as they are on those of Christian sects. The various sects do indeed profess to be subjected to the same captain, namely, Jesus Christ; but his commands come to their prejudiced ears in such contradictory sounds, that instead of being moved to act in unison, they move in opposite directions.

The pages of ecclesiastical history afford ample proof of the position that the church has been weakened by its divisions. During the first century commencing at the birth of Christ, when the church was united, more was done to diffuse and maintain Christianity in its purity and power, than in many centuries after she was shorn of her strength by becoming the subject of divisions. And during the short period subsequent to the commencement of the reformation, while the protestant church remained undivided, more was effected in the extension of Christianity and the establishment of its influence, than in the centuries of theological controversy and sectarian zeal which have followed. What progress

has been made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the demolition of Satan's throne? Nothing was done, save what was done by the Moravians to enlighten the darkness of heathenism, nor to dispel the delusions of Mahomet, nor to purify the countries covered with the abominations of popery, and the corruptions of the Greek church; and how little, if any thing was done, to elevate the standard of religion in Christian lands, or to supply the destitute with the means of grace. And why has the church made no progress? Is not Christianity like a grain of mustard seed, whose tendency is to grow quickly into a stately tree, so that the fowls of the air lodge under its branches? Is it not like leaven, whose nature is to diffuse itself through the whole lump? How comes it then that the church has not increased in holiness and extent? The strength of the church lies in the union of its members; but the bond of union has been broken, and the church has consequently been involved in a protracted civil war between her own members, instead of invading and conquering the country of the enemy.

Satan, having drawn the church from the strong position of its unity, has persevered in his efforts to promote further divisions, and has been too succesful. Knowing that to divide is to conquer, he is still pursuing the broken ranks of his enemy, and is sowing the seeds of discord in the numerous fragments. Almost every denomination has, within a few years past, been broken into new divisions, and some appear at this moment to be ripe for another schism. Unless God in his mercy interpose and breath the spirit of union upon his church, we see not what is to prevent the process of subdivision to continue its course until the church shall in truth be brought to utter desolation.

CHAPTER III.

OBJECTIONS TO THE ABOLITION OF SECTS ANSWERED.

1. *That the benefit of emulation will be lost.* 2. *That it will involve a sacrifice of principle, to unite with Christians who have not the same faith.* There is one faith common to all Christians. — What is the faith once delivered to the saints, — and how to be contended for. — Forbearance also a principle not to be sacrificed. — 3. That *divers denominations are necessary to preserve purity of doctrine.* 4. *That they are also necessary to operate upon all classes of the people.* 5. *The danger of uniting church and state.* 6. *That if sects were abolished, the church would soon again be divided.*

Having exhibited at some length the evils of sect, we ought perhaps in the next place to inquire whether there are not some advantages which have resulted to the church from its divisions. None surely to balance the terrible evils which have been occasioned by them. Division being itself an evil, any advantage that may have arisen from it, cannot prove that it is beneficial.

It proves only that God can overrule the greatest evils so as to produce from them some measure of good. In this point of view, every evil which has befallen the church or the world, has its use. We are informed, from high authority, that heresies have an important use, namely, to sift the church of its chaff; but this can scarcely be admitted as a solid reason why heresies should be countenanced and continued, nor would it be very wise to institute a comparison between the value of heresy and that of the truth of God. Even the apostacy of our first parents has been overruled to a very valuable purpose, namely, to exhibit the justice and the mercy of God, and his unfathomable wisdom. Must we therefore defend the apostacy and cling to it? Or is it not clearly every man's duty to use his utmost endeavours to recover from its fatal effects, and to become holy as God is holy?

If we have not made a very overcharged exhibition of the evils of division, it is scarcely possible to conceive that there can be any advantages to conterbalance them. If we have proved the unlawfulness and the unconstitutionality of sectarian divisions, then it matters not how many or how great are the benefits resulting from them; for we may not weigh the advantages resulting from continuing in disobedience to God's law against the crime of disobedience. This is utterly inadmissible. Yet may we be permitted, in order to give to our subject a full discussion, to examine the supposed advantages of the divisions in the church: this we shall do while we answer the objections which are made to the abolition of sects.

FIRST OBJECTION.

It is objected that by abolishing sects, *emulation* between Christians, which is one of the most powerful motives of action, *will be destroyed.*

To sustain this objection, it must be alleged that while the church is divided into sects, one being jealous of the prosperity and honours of the rest, they will be more unwilling to be outdone in any good work, than if the church were united under one name. The objector may, however, deny that the emulation of opposing denominations is founded on jealousy of each other's welfare and glory, and may simply appeal to the injunction upon Christians, to "provoke one another to good works," and may insist that this command will be best performed by the church in its divided state.

It is the misfortune of error, always to be driven to false principles to support its positions; and its advocates are often under the necessity of appealing to unholy motives, not sanctioned, but condemned in the word of God. We can readily conceive how the praiseworthy conduct of an individual Christian may provoke (that is excite) another to imitate and even excel him; and how the good works of Christians in one place may incite those of another place to follow the example; and we see not why the power of example cannot operate as effectually upon Christians in the united church, as when divided into parties. The only reason that can possibly be assigned, is that sects are envious and jealous of the success enjoyed, and the commendation bestowed upon other sects, and this gives power to the principle of emulation, which prompts each to excel, and thereby appropriate to itself the profit and praise

which would otherwise fall to the share of its rival. The history of sects abundantly shows that they have been more swift to follow evil than good example. What one has learned from and has been excited to do by the example of another, has been directed more to the interests of party than to advance the kingdom of Christ. And what better could be expected as the fruit of so unholy a motive, as that of envy or jealousy? From these sordid passions, arise all the emulation that exists between opposing sects, at least all that can furnish a more powerful motive than that which may actuate Christians in the united state of the church. It is this emulation which is condemned by the apostle as one of the fruits of the flesh, springing, as it does, from the corruption of the unregenerate heart. Gal. v. 19 to 21. When the happy exemplification of Christian character or conduct by one man, or by the church in one place, becomes the means of awakening the attention of other men, or of the churches in another place, and of exciting them by the exhibition of what others can do, and are willing to do for Christ, to go and do likewise, without the desire of gratifying jealousy or self glorying, then alone are Christians provoked or excited to love and good works from scriptural motives. This was the use which the apostle sought to make of a praiseworthy example, when he commended to the Corinthians the liberality of the churches of Macedonia. 2 Cor. viii. The apology for sectarian divisions, on the ground that the church will lose the benefit of carnal emulations, is only a specimen of the body of false ethics, which have been learned in the school of sect. We have already exposed numerous instances, and will disdiscover many more, as we proceed in our discussion.

The advocates for sect seem absolutely to have forgotten that love — not the love of sect — but the love of holiness, the love of Christ, the love of mankind, is represented in the Scriptures as the most powerful of all the motives that can actuate an intelligent mind. It was love that moved the Father to spare his well beloved Son, and moved the Son to leave his Father, assume the nature of man, and suffer, and die. It was the love of Christ that moved Paul, and all the holy apostles, to forsake all and endure all things, that they might please and obey him, and benefit mankind. It was the principle of holy love which the apostle Paul names as the constraining power that actuated the genuine preachers of the gospel. It is the same principle which he describes with so much eloquence and force, as that which sustains the Christian under tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. Rom. viii. 35, &c. And when will this principle exhibit its greatest efficiency; while it is contaminated and enfeebled by its commixture with sectarian and party pride, envy, jealousy, and emulations; or when its professors shall have achieved the victory over their carnal affections, healed the dissentions in the church, and united in one brotherhood the family of God on earth?

Further, if the division of the church gives birth to a more powerful motive to do good, than can exist in its undivided state, it seems strange that Christians are not commanded, or at least encouraged to split into parties, so as to put themselves into the best possible condition for doing good. It is passing strange that the apostle Paul, who enjoins it upon Christians to provoke one another to love and good works, should not only

have neglected to point to the best mode of effecting this object, the division of the church, but that he should have enjoined the Corinthian believers, who were already splitting into parties, that there *must be no divisions among them.*

SECOND OBJECTION.

Another objection to the abolition of sects, is that it involves a *sacrifice of principle*, to unite with Christians of a different faith.

In the epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul exhorts the saints and the faithful in that city, evidently including those who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, with all lowliness and meekness to forbear one another in love, and that they should endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The argument upon which he founds the duty of forbearance, is that there is one body and one spirit, even as they were all called in *one hope of their calling;* and that there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. Eph. iv. 2 to 5. In the twelfth and thirteenth verses of the same chapter, he states the end or design of the means of grace enjoyed by the church, to be for the edifying of the body of Christ, "till we all come in the *unity of the faith*, and the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man."

These verses evidently convey the idea that there is *a faith common to all believers*, even as the hope of their calling is common to them all. That the Christians at Ephesus were perfectly united in all points essential and unessential, can scarcely be believed, although the apostle does not mention any particular differences as existing between them. That they were liable to such differences, is evidenced by the injunction made by the

apostle of the duty of forbearance to be exercised by one towards another, being bound together by the same hope, faith, baptism, and under the authority of one master.

What sacrifice of principle is demanded by the proposal to unite in one church all the saints of God? Is it asked of you that you shall renounce the belief of what appears to you to be the mind of God, in any portion of his word? By no means. You are left at perfect liberty to adhere to your own belief, without the surrender of a single article or point; but you ought to be willing to allow the same freedom of opinion to others which you demand for yourself. Do you answer I am willing that Christians should adhere to their opinion, though different from my own; but they must go to another church? We answer, this is not forbearance, but merely abstinence from the grosser forms of coercion and persecution. That there is a wide difference between these, you will readily concede.

Do you know, Christian brother, what you mean by a sacrifice of principle, as being demanded of you by the proposal to belong to the same church with those who do not in all things agree with yourself? Or do you only require that those who shall live in the same communion with yourself should embrace every doctrine which you hold to be *fundamental?* Then there is no difference between us; for all Christians fundamentally and essentially have but one faith, according to the assertion of the apostle above quoted.

Or do you contend that to belong to the same church, its members should have the same creed on all *important* points? Then it may be necessary for you to define what you mean by the word important. If that

word conveys to your mind an idea different from the word fundamental or essential, we demand of you what authority you have from the Scriptures, for refusing to hold communion with such as you admit to be sound in the faith on all fundamental points, and yet differ from you on matters not fundamental but important. It is obviously more easy to discover from the Bible what are the essential articles of the Christian faith, than what are the important ones; and Christians standing free from the artificial shackles of sect, would find little or no difficulty to unite in a declaration of what are the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. If a definition can be made at all of the word important, when applicable to matters of religious belief, it must be entirely of the invention of man; and on this subject, there is room for so much difference of sentiment, as that scarcely two intelligent Christians would be found of the same opinion. The truth is that *every* doctrine contained in the Bible is more or less important; and if the children of God must be agreed on every important article of belief, before they can, without a sacrifice of principle, belong to the same church, they must either be perfectly of one mind, as to every tenet they draw from the Scriptures, or they must find some scale which has never yet been discovered, whereby to determine how important a given article of belief must be, to warrant a separation between Christians. This will be conceded to be impracticable; and therefore the objector is driven to take the ground that every man must be his own judge of the importance of any specified doctrine; and that he is at liberty to belong or not to belong to the same communion with others who differ from him, according to his own private judgement of its importance. And thus we

are left without any rule of action, except the judgement of the individual, irrespective of the Holy Scriptures. And then it results in this that the principle which the objector is so reluctant to sacrifice, is not any principle deduced from the only standard of faith and practice, but his own private fancy.

We presume it will not be denied that our Saviour was as tenacious of principle as any of his followers ought to be. But he remained in the same spiritual family with his disciples, notwithstanding their doubts and their unbelief of doctrines which were, in his view, very important, namely, the spirituality of his kingdom, his death, and resurrection; he having received them upon the evidence they gave of their attachment to him and his cause, and their belief in him as the Son of God and the promised Messiah. If in his ministry he was more lax in the admission of disciples than he designed his followers should be, this can only be inferred either from the dimness of the light, then but dawning upon the world, when compared with the full light that was thereafter to shine upon it, or from some command or intimation given by himself, or by his inspired apostles after his death. We may indeed require a different degree of evidence touching the Christian character of such as may apply for admission into the church, than what was required by the Saviour and his apostles, since we have now a more full revelation from God, as to what constitutes that character, than what was given in the Old Testament; which was all the Scripture then extant: and inasmuch as a simple avowal of faith in Christ, in that period of the church, afforded, under all the circumstances then existing, stronger evidence of a change of heart than the same act would now afford; yet the

inquiry in relation to proper subjects of church membership must, at this day, be directed to the same point to which it was then directed, namely, to ascertain whether they have passed from death to life, from darkness to light. We may be allowed at this day to be more minute in our inquiries, both as to matters of faith and religious conduct, in order to arrive at this conclusion, in proportion to the facilities now enjoyed of knowing with certainty the mind of God on points of faith and practice, and the inducements to make a profession of religion, while the heart is unrenewed, when compared with the first periods of Christianity. But inasmuch as the Saviour did not insist as a text of discipleship, that those whom he received should assent to every important article which *he knew* to be contained in the Old Testament, what right have we to demand as a condition of church membership an assent to every important article which *we believe, but do not know* to be contained in the Scriptures? As Christ required from his disciples such a belief as afforded reasonable evidence of their love to God, so we may require such a belief as to afford reasonable evidence of the same fact. But as soon as we push our inquiries beyond this point, we cease to follow the example of our Lord and Master, and require what we have no warrant to require.

If Christ or his apostles have given us any other directions as to the terms of church fellowship, than those which he himself practised, we may lawfully follow them, and are bound so to do. No such directions are found in the New Testament. The Saviour himself evidently desired that all his disciples should be one in feeling, in counsel, in action, and in name, even as he and the Father were one. The apostles practised on

no different principle than their Master had done before them in the reception of members into the church. And Paul directs the church at Rome, after having strongly inculcated the principle of forbearance, to receive one another, as Christ also received them, to the glory of God. Rom. xvi. 7.

The objector still urges that Christians are commanded, Jude 3, to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints;" and how, it is asked, shall we contend for the faith, if we give countenance to error, by holding church fellowship with those who deny it? The question is what the apostle Jude intended by the faith once delivered to the saints. From the context it seems quite evident to us that he refers to the faith which was not possessed by those *ungodly* men who had crept in, unawares, turning the grace of God, into laciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ; that he means the same faith which is common to all real Christians, and of which the apostle Peter speaks, 2 Pet. i. 1, where he addresses those who had obtained the like precious faith with himself, through the righteousness of God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; that it is the same faith of which St. Paul speaks, Eph. iv. 5, where he declares that as there is but one Lord, so there is but one faith; and that must be the faith which is common to all who love the Saviour. "The doctrine of the primitive church is to be "learnt with the utmost certainty, from the books of the "New Testament. These books were received by the "leading men in the Christian assemblies, and ap-"proved of by the people at large; they were publicly "read and carefully preserved and transmitted, and hav-"ing been collected into a volume, towards the end of

"the first century, they became to all the followers of "Jesus throughout the world, the only standard of faith, "and the only rule of righteous conduct. The primi- "tive church believed that there is one God uncreated "and everlasting; that the Logos or Word of God, who "was in the beginning with God, and was God, became "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and dwelt "upon the earth; that he gave himself for us, an offer- "ing and a sacrifice, and that being justified by faith, "we have peace with God; that our present state is a "state of condemnation, corruption, and suffering; that "by the transgression of our first progenitor, sin entered "into the world, and death by sin, and that death hath "passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. That "the soul of man shall exist in a future and unchangea- "ble state of happiness or misery; that by the influence "of the Holy Ghost, our understandings are enlightened "in all heavenly knowledge, and our hearts changed "from all evil dispositions; that Jesus Christ having "risen from the dead, will appear in the end of all "things, as the judge of the whole world, and that in "the great day of trial and retribution, he will receive "his followers into mansions of happiness, where they "shall abide forever, beholding his glory, the glory "which he had with the Father, before the world was. "This is the sum of the doctrine maintained by the early "churches, and it is this doctrine alone which they "agreed in considering as the faith once delivered to "the saints." Edinburgh Encyclopedia, vol. viii. 126. Title "Ecclesiastical History."

But if the objector has satisfied himself on due examination, and the exercise of his deliberate judgement, what is precisely in all points the faith mentioned by the

apostle Jude, so as to distinguish it from the faith of all other sects than his own, we will ask him not to surrender the privilege of contending for it as earnestly as his sense of the injunction may warrant; but we entreat him not to contend for it in a manner manifestly unlawful. Let him argue and persuade with all his powers, and with all the perseverance which the desire and hope of doing good may inspire; but let him not contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, by driving from or keeping out of his church every Christian who cannot conscientiously assent to every article in his creed, nor by refusing to hold full Christian fellowship with such as he has reason to believe really and truly to be members of Christ's spiritual body. Jesus Christ did not so contend for the faith, when he received his disciples with all their obscurity of views, their prejudices and misapprehensions. The apostles did not contend for the faith delivered to the saints, by cutting of from the church such as conscientiously believed circumcision to be required under the Christian dispensation. St. Paul commanded the Corinthians to excommunicate the incestuous person, and directed Titus to cast incorrigible heretics out of the church; he expressed to the Galatians his wish that the corrupt teachers who had troubled them and seduced them from their belief in the righteousness which is of faith and not of works, were cut off; but he does not advise the more orthodox Galatians to organize themselves into a church, and adopt such a creed as would exclude their less orthodox or less established brethren. On the contrary, he exhorts all the brethren not to bite and devour one another; to maintain love, peace, long suffering, and to restore in meekness such as had been overtaken in a fault, without dis-

tinguishing whether this long suffering was to be observed towards delinquents in matters of faith, or matters of practice. In the ample instructions given in the epistles to Timothy and Titus, in regard to the government of the church, not a word is uttered that can be construed into a command or even a warrant to exclude such as have not the same views of divine truth in every particular with themselves. The epistles and the book of revelations furnish us with many of the marks of unchristian professors and teachers, and particularize many matters of belief, the maintenance or denial of which evidence the state of the heart; but in no instance is any countenance given to the idea of withdrawing from or excluding such as hold to the foundation of the faith once delivered to the saints. *It was left to God* to consume the wood, hay, and stubble that might be erected upon the true foundation.

Were Jesus Christ or his apostles less acquainted with the faith once delivered to the saints, or were they less tenacious of principle than the apologists of sect at the present day? They were intimately acquainted with every principle of religion, and of the relative importance of every one of them. There is no principle more earnestly or more clearly inculcated in the Scriptures, than that of Christian forbearance, in both matters of faith and practice, enforced by the fact of the unity of the church, all its members being members one of another, and Christ the head of the whole body. You, then, who are so fearful of making a sacrifice of principle, what exempts you from the observance of the principle of forbearance which stands out so clearly throughout the whole of the inspired volume, as that he who runs may read? The principle to which you tena-

ciously adhere is, to speak in the mildest terms of human invention, and not to be found in the Bible. While, then, you make conscience of not sacrificing a principle for which you have only the authority of man, you do not scruple to violate a most important principle, taught and strenuously insisted on in the oracles of God.

This notion of a sacrifice of principle being involved in belonging to the same church with those who do not in all points agree is, after all, rather an error of the heart, than a mistake of the judgement; in other words, it is but an apology for the manifestation of wrong feelings towards those who have obtained like precious faith with themselves. This we infer from the facility with which the notion is, in practice, often abandoned by good men, who are by no means deficient in judgement. A mere change of circumstances is often followed by a change of conduct in such as previously refrained from holding Christian fellowship with their brethren of another denomination, lest it should countenance their errors, or otherwise involve a sacrifice of principle. A marriage sometimes effects a total revolution in this particular with a whole family, and that without exciting any surprise, or causing any suspicion as to the purity of their motives, or any doubt of the propriety of their conduct. Often has a minister of the gospel been called to take the charge, and actually taken charge of a church composed of the very men with whom he could not previously have held Christian fellowship, nor they with him, without being accused by themselves and others of having made a sacrifice of principle. And these changes take place, without the consciousness in any of the parties, that any principle has been sacrificed.

THIRD OBJECTION.

Another objection against the abolition of sects is, that *divers denominations are necessary to preserve the purity of doctrine.*

There is a class of sectarians who conceive of the truth as the miser does of a precious jewel, that may be locked up in a casket, and remain there for ages, and preserve all its intrinsic value. The man of business would estimate the value of the jewel by its utility in carrying on the purposes of trade, and in purchasing the necessaries of life. The man of benevolence would esteem it valuable only, as it would serve to diffuse the means of comfort and happiness among his fellow creatures. But these sectarians seem happy in the thought of possessing a document setting forth in uninspired language their peculiar views of doctrine in the form of a creed, catechism, confession of faith, or system of theology, and they carefully lock it up in their own small denomination, as a precious jewel, not to be seen or to benefit any but themselves and their own children. They are perfectly aware that their own sect is too weak to carry the gospel abroad to the heathen and the destitute, and they feel under no obligation to make the attempt. If they entertain the hope that the pure doctrine in their possession will ever benefit the world, the hope must be founded on the supposition that by some means to them unknown and unthought of the savour of its intrinsic excellence will be diffused on every side, until, like leaven, it shall fill the earth with its fragrance. They conceive of the truth in their possession as of the most fine gold, and rather than to hazard its admixture with the less precious silver and brass of other denomi-

nations, they would leave the world under the tyranny of Satan, and its inhabitants to drop, by thousands, annually, into the bottomless pit. Surely no argument can be necessary to expose the folly and wickedness of such contracted unscriptural views.

There is another class of Christians who believe that the different denominations hold each other in check and preserve between them the balance of truth. This is a quaint notion, and although entertained by numbers, cannot have been adopted as a sentiment upon very mature consideration. Were all sects abolished, so as to leave Christians at liberty to study the creeds of other denominations, they might from them all compose a formula of faith which would possibly be nearer the truth than any human production that has yet appeared; but how the articles of one church can hold in check the articles of another, or how the balance of truth can thus be preserved, is to us utterly unintelligible. The truth of one creed is not needed to hold in check the truth of another, for if they are both truths, they require neither to be checked, or balanced. The truth of one cannot check or balance the error of another, for every denomination adheres closely to its own truths and its own errors; and it certainly will not be pretended that the errors of one serve any valuable purpose to check or balance the errors of another. But suppose the check or balance may be actually inherent in the variety of creeds, how and upon whom are the benefits of it to be made to bear? Were but a portion of the Christian community divided into sects, the residue would reap all the advantages to be derived from this check; but to whose benefit is it to inure, since every professor of religion is obliged to belong to one sect or another, and

is in duty bound, by the laws of sect to prefer his own to all the rest, in the same sense that a citizen is bound to adhere to his own country, when opposed by all the world besides. All the profit, then, of this balance of truth must be left to those who make no pretensions to religion, and who of course cannot be supposed to be very solicitous on the subject of theological truth.

But to speak without irony, we verily believe that instead of the different denominations holding each other in check, the creed of one drives another farther from the Bible, and that instead of preserving the balance of truth between them, sectarian divisions have a strong tendency to mar the beauty, corrupt the purity and destroy the power of truth. It is certain that of the opposite articles of different creeds, one or the other must be erroneous. By being adopted as a matter of faith in a certain denomination, the error is perpetuated; while but for the existence of sectarian divisions, it might soon have been buried in oblivion. That practical religion has much degenerated under the dominion of sect, is most certain, which could scarcely have been the result, if a diversity of denominations serve to preserve the purity of doctrine. We are willing to concede that the doctrinal opinions held in one sect may, in some instances, have been modified by such as are held in an antagonist one; but we deny that this is at all attributable to the existence of sectarian divisions. This is merely the influence of mind upon mind, and the same operation would be going on, were the church again united. There would then, without doubt, be differences of opinion on unessential matters, and all the benefit of the influence of mind upon mind would still be realized; with this important advantage, that the prejudices, non-

intercourse and opposition caused by distinctions of sect, would not subsist among those of the same church, and there would be more candour, sincerity, and simplicity of desire to learn the truth from each other, than there now is.

The best scheme for preserving the purity of doctrine, according to some Roman Catholic divines, is to invest in a council of ecclesiastical dignitaries, the prerogative of determining in all cases what shall be received as the truth. We do not readily perceive why one member of such a council might not be a check upon the other, nor why the *different individuals* who compose the council may not preserve the balance of truth between them, quite as well as the *different sects*. There is this advantage in favour of the council, that it forms but one body, the majority whereof declares the rule, while among the sects, each one declares for itself, no one having authority over the rest; and therefore Protestants can receive the truth only in contradictory decrees pronounced by a multitude of independent courts. The members of the Roman Catholic church, on the other hand, enjoy the privilege of knowing the exact truth, as declared by one infallible court, free from the trouble, labour, and perplexity of balancing a multitude of conflicting decisions. In point of theory, the church of Rome seems to possess a decided advantage, and we might be tempted to give the preference to her views of the rules of faith and judge of controversy, did not we know how lamentably Christianity has been corrupted by her, if not wholly banished from her communion.

Both Roman Catholics and sectarian Protestants admit that the truth is not so clearly expressed in the

Scriptures; but that it requires to be written over again, in different language, by authority of the church, to make it intelligible, and deliver it from controversy. There are indeed two points of difference between them; Protestants place the authority in many councils, and the Catholics admit of but one. The latter pronounce the decrees of their own council to be infallible; the former do not in terms claim the decisions of their many councils to be infallible, but many of them adhere to those decisions with as much tenacity to all practical purposes, as if they were infallible. In discussing the question on the rule of faith and judge of controversy with the Catholics, the Protestant sectarians make the Bible the only rule of faith, and every man for himself, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the judge of what the Bible means; but when they deal with a clergyman or layman of their own denomination, while the Scriptures are, in theory, admitted to be the only rule of faith, the the church is substituted for the conscience of the individual, who must, by uniting himself with the church, surrender his judgement to her dictates.

We believe that purity of doctrine was maintained in the days of the apostles, and in the primitive ages of Christianity, without the aid of sectarian divisions; and if a united church was competent, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to understand the meaning of the Scriptures of truth in that period, we cannot comprehend how it can be necessary, in this age of the world, to keep the church in its divided state, in order to preserve the right understanding of the Scriptures, especially as we have the same Spirit for our teacher, besides the discussions and history of many centuries.

FOURTH OBJECTION.

It is objected against the reunion of the church, that *sundry denominations are necessary to operate to advantage upon all classes* of the people.

Some denominations, it is said, are better adapted for the rich, the polite, and the learned; others for the middling classes in point of wealth, manners, and intelligence; others for the poor and unlearned; some for the populous towns and compact portions of the country; while others are better calculated to carry the gospel into the sparse settlements and the wilderness.

While the church was united in the early periods of its history, the gospel was carried to all classes of the people; and we see not why the same object may not be accomplished after sectarian divisions shall cease. Under the present organization, polity, views and feelings of some other denominations, we admit that the whole of the population would scarcely be supplied with the means of grace, to the extent they now are; and this defect may have operated as an encouragement to the formation or enlargement of other sects. But there is nothing in the nature of a united church that would hinder it from embracing within its operations the whole family of human souls; on the contrary, there is much in union to facilitate extension and profitable distribution of labour. It requires a variety of talent, disposition, and habit to answer all the ends of Christian effort, and this variety may be found employed and directed by the united as well as the divided church, and may be made to operate with more efficiency, and the whole conducted in the spirit of love, instead of being moved by the spirit of party jealousy and strife. In the apos-

tolic age, there was a diversity of talent, taste, acquirement, and habit, and a diversity of spiritual gifts besides. The apostles, however, did not deem it necessary or expedient to divide the church into parties, so as to afford better scope for the qualifications of the labourers to be employed. Nor does St. Paul seem to have discerned the advantage the church might have reaped from permitting the Corinthians to consummate their party divisions, by the formation of several independent sects, who might then have availed themselves of the diversified talents and dispositions of their Paul, their Apollos, and their Cephas, and the various spiritual gifts of the admirers and followers of each leader. This would commend itself to our advocates for sect, as an admirable expedient for operating upon all classes of the community, to the best possible advantage. But so thought not Paul; for he enjoins them, in the most strenuous manner, to heal their carnal divisions, not to arrange themselves under different names; but to remain together in one body, of one name and heart; so that all might act in harmony, like the different members of the human body. This is the wisdom of God, which is often found to be in direct opposition to the wisdom and traditions of men.

FIFTH OBJECTION.

The next objection against the abolition of sects, is *the danger of uniting church and state.*

This objection, sometimes made by the friends of religion, has been borrowed from its opposers, who dread the concentrated energies of a united church. What they fear is not simply a union of church and state, but their aversion to Christianity leads them to fear that it

may attain such an ascendency as to elevate a majority of Christian men to office in the civil government. This event cannot certainly be deprecated, but must be devoutly desired by all intelligent Christians. It is barely possible that the sectarian prejudices of some may be so strong as that they would prefer to be governed by men destitute of religion, to the hazard incurred by the general prevalence of religion, that some of the larger sects might grow into a majority of the electors, fill the offices of state with men of their own denomination, and then perpetuate the ascendency by law.

It is the low state of piety that keeps the church divided into parties, and it will never be reunited, until the pure religion of the Bible shall have taken a stronger hold upon the hearts of its professors. Low as religion is, not a Christian of any intelligence can be found, who does not deprecate the union of church and state, as one of the greatest calamities that can befall the church, it being clear, from history and the relation of cause and effect, that when civil power is not attainable without a religious profession, the whole world of avarice and ambition will crowd themselves into the church, and destroy its spiritual character. The principle which will bring Christians into one band of union, is that of love, no other principle being of sufficient power to melt down the obstacles, and introduce harmony into the discordant materials. The process of effecting a reunion of the church must greatly increase the amount of personal religion among her members. If, then, with our present degree of light, religious feeling, and regard for the church, we see and deprecate the union of church and state, how can it be supposed that such a union will be desired and attempted, when Christians shall be more

deeply imbued with the spirit of the gospel, as they must be, before sects shall be abolished.

We admit it to be possible, that with the prosperity of the church, the spirit of the world may, in process of time, be revived; professed Christians may then seize the reins of government, and by legal enactments, exclude others from it. But this argument proves too much; because from the same premises, it may, with equal reason, be concluded that the general prevalence of the Christian religion is not desirable, lest the administration of the civil government should fall into the hands of Christians, and all other persons be excluded by law. This is surely a strange argument, when used by Christians, however much in character it may be, when proceeding from the enemies of religion.

No; intolerance has no affinity with the pure and spiritual religion of the Bible. It is the corrupting influence of the spirit of sect and party which has given birth to all the test acts which have ever been adopted. And should unfortunately any of the denominations now in existence, or hereafter to arise, becoming more conformed to the world than the rest, gain the favour of the irreligious part of the community, or form an alliance with some political party, and thereby attain to the command of the civil government, they would be under a strong temptation to intrench themselves in power, and trample upon the rights of conscience. Here lies the danger of the union of the church and state, and not in the abolition of all sectarian distinctions.

SIXTH OBJECTION.

The last objection which we shall notice against the abolition of sects is, that *the reunion of the church, if effected, will be only temporary.*

This objection lies with equal force against every proposal for reforming what is amiss, or for suppressing what is evil. It will do no good to abolish lotteries, because men are more disposed to obtain money by gambling than by honest labour; and therefore public feeling will dictate public sentiment, and soon effect the restoration of the lottery system. Why should we weary ourselves in the attempt to suppress the evil of intemperance, and the abominations of the theatre, since the appetites and propensities of men will soon bring them back to former habits? And why should we disquiet ourselves and the Christian community, by attempting to abolish sects, since the discordant opinions, and contentious dispositions of Christians will soon split them again into parties?

What answer would Paul or our Saviour give to this objection? They would point him to the constitution of the church one and indivisible. They would show him the bond of union which God has provided to encompass all his children, and hold them together, namely, the holy principle of love, maintained in all its strength and beauty, by the exercise of mutual forbearance in the spirit of meekness. They would remind him of the many great and precious promises recorded in the Scriptures, and designed to make the children of God partakers of the divine nature, which is love itself, and upon which promises the church of God may confidently rely, when she walks in the path of duty. They would prove to the objector that this same bond of love, if Christians would only gird it around them, would be seen to possess the same efficacy which it had in the primitive ages, when for two or three centuries, the world was con-

strained to exclaim, behold how these Christians love one another!

Admitting, for the sake of argument, that the union of the church, though framed upon due deliberation, and after years of well directed preparatory measures, should prove not to be of permanent duration, is it not worth some pains to procure a temporary respite from the contentions, strife, and multiplied evils of sect? Is not a short peace among nations at war, deemed among all the wise worth the trouble of a negotiation for the restoration of peace?

If by a hasty movement upon some sudden impulse, the various denominations should become amalgamated, we readily concede that it would be utopian to expect a long continuance of such a union; as much so, as it would be to calculate upon a cessation from war in the earth, in case a congress of nations should suddenly agreē forever to sheathe the sword, without any preparatory measures having been taken to impress upon the minds of rulers and people a due appreciation of the sinfulness and evils of war, and the value of peace. To bring about the union of the church upon a solid and permanent basis, requires much of patient preparatory labour. Our views of what is necessary and expedient to accomplish this all-important object, will be given in a subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

OBSTACLES TO THE REUNION OF THE CHURCH.

1. The power of long cherished habits and opinions. — 2. The powerful interests which bind men to sect. — 3. The subjection of the periodical press to the interests of sect. — 4. The fear of odium and contempt. — 5. The many objects of attention already before the public. — 6. The present low state of religion. — 7. Human creeds, confessions of faith, and systems of theology.

Our aim, thus far, has been to impress upon the reader our own convictions of the unconstitutional and evil nature of sectarian divisions. Admitting that we have succeeded in satisfying his judgement of the correctness of our own convictions, he may yet see such obstacles, difficulties, and discouragements, in the way of reuniting the church, as to deter or discourage him from embarking in the enterprise of collecting the scattered fragments, and restoring her original unity. We propose, in this chapter, to take a view of these obstacles, and to show that they are by no means insurmountable. They may be removed, we apprehend, with the exercise of a

moderate share of Christian fortitude, zeal, and perseverance.

I. *The power of long cherished habits and opinions*, is the first obstacle which we shall notice.

It is true that Christians of the present, and several of the preceding generations, have breathed the very atmosphere of sect and party. The religious education of children, where it has not been of an infidel cast, or wholly neglected, has been of a sectarian character. From childhood to mature age, the same training has been continued; for our books, our schools of religious instruction, our preaching, the organization of our churches, have been sectarian. And it may be supposed that the Christian community are in conseqence as firmly settled in their opinion of the lawfulness of sect, as the Hindoo is in the propriety of caste, or the Mahometan in the truth of the alkoran. We may be told, moreover, that this opinion has been fortified by the sectarian habits which they have produced or cherished; insomuch that the professors of the gospel of peace and love, are so much accustomed to the exercise of jealousy and alienation of heart towards Christians of other sects, that the thought of uniting with them is wholly inadmissible.

Formidable as this obstacle is, we cannot admit it to be insuperable. It cannot be so difficult to convince the Christian whose mind is enlightened with a knowledge of the principles of the Holy Scriptures, that he may have overlooked or misapplied those principles, as it is to convince the Hindoo of the absurdity of caste, or the Mahometan of the falsity of the koran. To break down the prejudices of these, we have no argu-

ments to adduce but such as are addressed to their understandings, which have become wholly obscured by the false principles of their faith; but with the Christian, we meet on common ground, for we both acknowledge the Bible as the only rule of our faith and practice. And if from the Bible it can be satisfactorily proved that sects are unlawful, unconstitutional, and a Pandora's box of evils to the church, what right have we to assume that the lovers of truth will not be willing to hear the voice of truth speaking in the oracles of God, and obey its dictates? The reformation from popery, in the sixteenth century, is a standing proof of the power of scriptural truth to change the most inveterate and long cherished opinions; and the progress of temperance in our own times, is a convincing proof of the power of an enlightened conscience to change the most fixed habits, and even to conquer the strength of long indulged appetite.

The word of God is represented to be, and truly is, as the fire and hammer that breaks in pieces the hearts of the enemies of God, hard by nature, and more hardened by the continued practice of sin; and why then should we fear that the same word will fall powerless upon the hearts of the friends of God, which have been softened by the influences of the Holy Spirit. We may not judge so uncharitably of our Christian brethren, concerning whom we are in duty bound to think no evil, but to believe all things, and to hope all things. 1 Cor. xiii. 5, 7.

The sentiment that the antiquity of opinions and customs proves them to be correct, is much impaired in the minds of the Christian public; and as it is believed that the men of the present generation are capable of under-

standing the reasons adduced by their predecessors, for the opinions they have formed, it is no longer received as proof of an innovating spirit, to examine into the soundness of human opinions, practices, customs, and habits, how long soever they may have prevailed, and been assumed to be correct. The spirit of inquiry is awake, and has been quickened by the discoveries which have been made since the principle of implicit deference to by-gone ages has been on the decline. As it is now acknowledged that the church for two hundred years has slept upon the duty of carrying the gospel to a dying world, and has cherished in her bosom the dreadful evil of lotteries, intemperance, and slavery, the public mind is in some measure prepared to search what other evils may have crept into the church, during the long period of spiritual death and inactivity, wherein the powers of darkness have had ample scope for the exercise of their craft and malice. The maxim of the Bible "to the law and to the testimony," is again coming into vogue, as in the days of the reformation. Why then should we despair of the willingness of Christians to judge of the divisions which have torn the church in pieces, by the infallible standard of right and wrong?

II. Another obstacle that may be supposed to lie in the way of effecting a reunion of the church of Christ, is presented in *the powerful interests which bind men to the car of sect.*

But who are the persons so strongly interested to support sectarian divisions? The lay members of the church and the people at large would clearly be gainers by the reunion of the church, as they will save the enormous waste of men and money which we have pointed

out as one of the evils of division. The cost of maintaining the ministers of the gospel, theological schools, religious publications, and the erection and maintenance of houses for public worship, would probably be diminished one half by the abolition of sects. It would be principally the ministers of the gospel, and perhaps only a few of them, whose employments would be deranged by the change; and the derangement would be temporary only, as the united church will need all the efficient clergy which the present age can furnish. The officers of our theological schools would not necessarily be subjected to any change of employment, unless such schools, as are not in fact needed, should be discontinued.

But whatever sacrifices might be required of those officers, ministers of the gospel, or the higher dignitaries of the church, in order to remove so vast an evil as that of division, we may not indulge the doubt that they will be made with all the cheerfulness which Christian benevolence does not fail to inspire. Men who have devoted themselves to the service of Christ, may be made to understand what the interests of his church require, and may be induced to act in accordance with their convictions. They may be induced to practice the self-denial so frequently and strenuously inculcated by the Saviour and his apostles, and which they so eminently exemplified in their own practice, even to the forsaking of kindred, houses, lands, places of profit, and to the loss of life itself, if necessary to render obedience to the commands of Christ, and to advance the interests of his kingdom. St. Paul expresses his persuasion in the strongest terms that *nothing* can separate the true believer from the love of Christ. And there are not lack-

ing striking examples in our own times, of men possessing noble minds and commanding talents, who have abandoned comfortable homes, lucrative and honourable employments, the enjoyments of civilized life and country, and a healthful climate, to carry the gospel of salvation to the destitute, and to serve their divine Master in the stations allotted to them in his providence. Many laymen in this country have, in obedience to the dictates of an enlightened conscience, and the requirements of the public good, relinquished the lucrative employments of making and vending the products of the still. And can it be believed that the clergy, who are expected to take the lead in the direction of correct public sentiment, and to be ensamples in all things to the people, will be less disposed to yield to the circumstances that may be imposed on them, in consequence of so desirable a change in the concerns of the church, as the restoration of its original unity?

Perhaps we ought to admit that one of the most powerful interests which bind men to the support of sects, arises from the ambition of ministers of the gospel. There are, in this higly honourable and useful order of men, some who love distinctions and influence; and there may be those whose consequence, in their own view, consists mainly in being one of the leaders of a party, and whose standing would inevitably be lowered by the amalgamation of sects. They could not be great men in a large community, though they may hold a station of considerable consequence in a smaller one. It may be that this might influence some to oppose the reunion of the church. Were there many of this stamp, we confess it would present a most formidable obstacle. But we hope their number is small, and

that the opposition would prove feeble. Their characters are probably more correctly estimated than they themselves are aware, and their adherence to the interests of sect, would be attributed to the right cause.

Why then should it be supposed that the interests of Christians will oppose an insurmountable obstacle in so holy an enterprise as that of healing the dreadful wounds inflicted on the church by its divisions? Or shall we be compelled to add this to the list of the evils of division, that it has banished the virtue of self-denial from the church?

III. *The subjection of the periodical press to the interests of sect*, is another obstacle that may be urged to the proposed reformation.

And by some of the friends of union, it may be feared that the religious newspapers and periodicals of the day are too much under the influence of sectarian opinions, feelings, or patronage, to admit of their becoming the channel of bringing before the public doctrines subversive of their own views, or those of their patrons; and it may be apprehended that there is no other adequate medium of enlightening public opinion.

We are very reluctant to believe that there is any considerable number of our religious publications, into which it would be refused to admit discussions of such grave and important subjects, as the unity of the church, and the duties devolving upon Christians, in consequence of existing divisions. The spirit of bigotry has too much declined, and that of free inquiry has too far advanced to allow the indulgence of such apprehensions. We think it is evident from the complexion of the publications in question, that there will be no disposition to

withhold from the public the opportunity of reading discussions of doctrines not stale, nor manifestly erroneous or dangerous; or of opinions not decidedly singular; especially when deduced from the Scriptures; the acknowledged standard of religious truth. If the danger of losing patronage should be supposed to enter at all into their calculation, they may see the prospect of gaining more by the facility thus afforded to the friends of union, than they would lose by displeasing the apologists for sectarian divisions. The advocates for the unity of the church entertain no fears from the reflection that their opponents would justly claim and be entitled to an equal right to be heard; for they are perfectly willing, if their views are not capable of enduring the ordeal of strict scriptural examination and sound argument, to submit to the decision of an intelligent Christian community.

Should, however, the periodical press, contrary to our hopes, exclude all discussions on the subject in question, there is another resort. It is the glory of the American people that the press itself, in this country, is free as the light of heaven, and in one form or another, is accessible to all; and whatever means may become necessary in order to bring the question of the unity of the church fairly before the Christians of America, it is confidently believed that the friends of union will be found willing to furnish them.

IV. *The fear of odium and contempt.*

So deeply fixed and rooted, it may be imagined by some, is the opinion of the lawfulness and advantages of divisions, that the advocates and friends of reunion will be treated with derision, scorn, or hatred, as visionary theorists, or dangerous innovators, and perhaps be

regarded as attempting to add another name to the long list of religious denominations already distracting the church; or be viewed in the same light with the petty sects of Christians, Mormonites, and others, which profess not to belong to any of the pre-existing denominations, and to have no other creed but the Bible.

The subtle enemy of God knows well, that so long as he can succeed in fomenting divisions in the kingdom of Christ, his own dominion in the earth is secure; but he hears of the reunion of the protestant church as the knell of his departed power, for then shall the seed of the woman be endued with strength to crush the serpent's head. The cunning adversary has therefore, like a master spirit, contrived to magnify and multiply the obstacles to the reunion of his broken enemy; and perhaps one of his most artful devices has been to thrust forward his own instruments to take in part the same ground which he knew his enemy must occupy to deliver the church from the curse of division. He has accordingly excited fanatics, infidels, and men who hate the holy truths of the Bible, to arrogate to themselves the honour of being its most devoted friends, pretending to receive the Scriptures as the only standard of their faith. He has instigated these enemies of the church to assume the form of religious societies, professing to receive into their communion all Christians upon the broad ground of the Scriptures. That these are wolves in sheep's clothing has been so manifest from their unchristian conduct and palpable errors, that they have succeeded to decoy only a few of the ignorant and unwary ,and they have become the subjects of odium and contempt. And now it may be feared that the true friends of religion will be regarded with like feelings, when they propose to reunite

the church upon the broad ground of the constitution ordained by its head.

We have stated this obstacle thus fully in order to exhibit it in its true aspect, and thereby show that there is nothing formidable in it. All designing errorists, it is well known, mingle something of truth with their falsehoods; otherwise they would secure no adherents; and if the sectarians to which we have just alluded have adopted any one principle which is true, that principle is no less true for having been avowed by them, although they are the enemies of the church. Satan himself uttered some scriptural truths when he tempted the Saviour in the wilderness, and no Christian can justly be hated or despised for using the same for a lawful purpose. If it be a true doctrine of the Bible that God constituted the church one, and that its divisions into sects is unlawful and pregnant with evils without any *countervailing* advantages, then it is right and honourable to advocate and promote by proper means a return to its original unity; and if they find it necessary or profitable to assume principles, which have been perverted by fanatics and ungodly men, but which are nevertheless true, it seems to require only a small share of Christian fortitude to bear all the scorn and reproach to which they may in consequence be subjected.

V. *The many objects of attention already before the public.*

Those who view this as an obstacle in the way of the friends of union, must suppose that there are already so many schemes of benevolence engaging the time and care of the Christian community, that the plan for re-

uniting the church cannot be hoped to receive the attention and support necessary to its accomplishment.

We believe this to be a mistake. Wonders have been accomplished by a division of mental and bodily labour. And so in all the operations of religious charity, much can be done by the occupancy of his proper place by each, according to his capacity and inclination. The American Bible Society found agents and patrons to sustain it, notwithstanding the number already embarked in the cause of foreign missions; and when home missions were subsequently undertaken, Christians were found prepared to attend to the concerns of that enterprise. The Tract Society caused no diminution of attention or effort to any of the preceding. The Sunday School Union, the Education, Seamens' Friend, Prison Discipline, and Temperance Societies, as their successive claims have been presented to the public, have commanded as much of attention and interest, and the means of commencing and sustaining them have been as readily supplied as if they had respectively been the only benevolent enterprise on foot in the country. The Temperance Society, though last on the list, has been more vigorously sustained than any of its predecessors.

All these associations are now in progress, but are not combining the power they ought and which they would combine, if the whole body of Christians were held together in one bond of union. This would give them tenfold more of strength and efficiency. Admitting that to bring about this union, it will be necessary to secure an additional amount of attention and labour; it must also be conceded that as yet, but a small proportion of the whole number of true believers is actively employed in any Christian enterprise, and that it is very

desirable that all who are competent should find something to do in the service of their Master. The evils of division are palpable to the understandings of all classes of Christians, and all are capable of bearing some part in restoring the prevalence of love, forbearance, and unity in the church. Why then should we indulge the fear that this holy and all-important enterprise will fail of commanding the support necessary to its accomplishment? Let it be commenced, and it will not only be sustained, but give tone and vigour to every other scheme of benevolence.

VI. *The low state of religion.*

Many who entertain the belief of the ultimate reunion of the church, do not view it practicable at the present time, or at any except a remote period, and are consequently discouraged from any effort towards accomplishing it, while the standard of religion is so low; and are induced to postpone even the consideration of the subject until a more favourable era shall have dawned upon the church.

It is indeed of vital importance that the standard of religion should be elevated to a much higher point than it is at the present day; and we agree that until it shall be so elevated, little will be done to advance the great interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in any form. But how is a better state of things to be brought about? We answer, *the church must be purified by action and trial;* and we are happy in the belief that the process has commenced. Those benevolent enterprises which require contributions of money, such as the cause of missions, the spread of the Bible, and the like, are trying Christians on their love of mammon, when the love of Christ

requires them to surrender it. The temperance reformation tries them on their attachment to appetite, habit, and fashion; while those plans which call on Christians for their personal attention, thought, and active exertions, such as the distribution of tracts and teaching in Sunday Schools, are trying their love of ease. We cannot conceive of any means better adapted to forward the salutary process of trial and action, than the scheme of healing the divisions of the church. It will act like the refiner's fire and the fuller's soap. It will test the love of Christians for the universal church of Christ on earth, and their regard for the authority of God in constituting the church one and indivisible. It will distinguish between the love of party and the love of the brethren; between the love of sectarian emoluments and dignities, and their love of the service of Christ. It will discover to men the strength of their attachment to their own temporal interest, and to their own peculiarities, and to the traditions of men when brought in competition with the commands of the Saviour, and the requirements of God's own word.

In what manner Christians generally will be brought into active efforts to advance Christ's kingdom, by prosecuting the scheme for reuniting the church, will be shown in a subsequent chapter, where we shall point out the means to be pursued for its attainment.

While, therefore, we admit that the low state of religion forbids the hope of an *immediate* abolition of sects, it furnishes no reason why the work needful to accomplish the object should not be commenced. This appears to us to be the point to which Christian effort should now be directed, and we perceive little ground of

hope that the standard of religion will be elevated by any other means.

VII. *Creeds, Confessions of Faith, and Systems of Theology.*

Though this obstacle is of a character somewhat similar to that with which we commenced this chapter, it is believed to be so far distinguished from it as to require a separate consideration. It may be feared that this will prove the most formidable of all the obstacles to the reunion of the church, as these creeds constitute the very walls of partition that divide the church. The creeds, *and in some instances* the confessions of faith, are formally proposed to applicants for church membership, and their assent thereto required as an indispensable term of their reception. Books containing systems of theology, Bibles with commentaries in support of those systems, creeds, and confessions of faith, are scattered in each sect, more or less throughout the families of which they are composed; and the children drink in with their mother's milk a veneration and attachment to the creed of their parents. How then, it is asked, can there be any hope of removing this obstacle?

We admit that here is presented a serious difficulty, which it may require time and patience to remove; but that it is insuperable we are not willing to believe. Independently of the consideration that God loves the truth, and has power over the human heart to impress the truth upon it, our hope is that the effort is to be made upon Christians, who admit the Bible to be from God, and acknowledge it their duty to render obedience to all its requirements; that we shall be addressing ourselves

to ministers of the gospel and others, who are capable of understanding and appreciating the claims of the inspired writings, as infinitely superior to any human production, how wise soever may have been the author, or however wise or numerous may have been its advocates and adherents. However venerable any human writings may be, even in the eyes of those who have long been in the habit of referring to them as standards, they are still but the work of men, fallible men, and cannot stand in opposition to *the word of God, which is the only standard* of religious faith and practice. If the church was constituted by its head one and indivisible, and if the existing divisions are in violation of its constitutional unity; if these points are incontrovertibly proved, then, as soon as it shall be perceived that creeds or any other work of man stands as a barrier against the reunion of the church, charity forbids us to assume that Christians will be too stubborn to consent to the removal of the obstacle.

Every creed is under the control of the denomination which has adopted it, and may be modified or surrendered at its will. So may every thing except the Bible. This alone is sacred, being the word and work of God himself. If this be lost all is lost; if this be preserved all is safe; whatever else is changed or abandoned. The true doctrine of the unity of the church being considered and examined, will be found to be at variance with the lawfulness of any creed, not embracing all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. To convince the generality of intelligent Christians of this truth, is an attainable object, and well worth a few years of thought and effort. And it may be found amidst the changes which are now going on with such rapidity in the world, that sooner than we now dare to hope, creeds may be so

modified as to exclude only the fundamental errorist. Then, to keep out the irreligious man, who may profess a sound faith but deny the same in his practice, must be entrusted, as it must be under every form of administering the church, to a faithful ministry, and a watchful discipline, upon the principles of the Bible.

CHAPTER V.

THE FACILITIES OR ENCOURAGEMENTS TO REUNION.

The staleness of religious controversy. — Experience for 200 years of the evils of division. — The union of several denominations actually formed of late for various benevolent purposes. — The harmonious faith of Christians on essential doctrines, evidenced by the publications of the American Tract Society. — The alarm manifested by the advocates of sect. — The alarm manifested by the enemies of religion. — Late publications, &c. evidencing that the principle of union is at work in the hearts of Christians. — The diffusion of useful knowledge. — Prophecy.

HAVING considered the obstacles standing or supposed to stand in the way of the reunion of the church, and having shown that none of them are insuperable, let us next inquire whether there be not at the present time favourable circumstances and indications, which ought to be regarded as encouraging to the friends of union, and facilitating the accomplishment of the work before them.

1. As the spirit of controversy is one of the great causes of division, it is certainly encouraging to observe, that religious controversy has become so stale, as not to command the universal attention and excite the intense interest which it has in time past. Although there is not, perhaps in the generality of Christians, any decrease of attachment to the peculiarities of their own sect, that attachment can no longer be secured by the interest felt in religious controversy. The truth is, the topics of discussion are exhausted. All the points of difficulty presented in the Bible have already been again and again examined and argued out, so that it seems almost impracticable to present any new subjects of dispute, and novelty is indispensable to command sufficient interest even to insure the reading of what may be written. Besides, a considerable proportion of intelligent Christians find so much of active labour to perform, that they have neither time nor inclination to read on subjects of controversy. For these reasons it is that the discussions on theological subtleties and practical differences, which fill some of the columns of our religious periodicals, are uniformly passed over by perhaps more than half of their readers. Neither the dispute between the old school and the new school, however zealously conducted; nor the apparently new aspect which that controversy may have assumed in the subtle discussions between Taylor and his antagonists, nor the still more recent "Act and Testimony" of the dissenters from the Presbyterian church, suffice to awaken a general interest in the Christian community. The battle is interesting to few except the combatants; while the many turn away in disgust or grief from the spectacle. And the more the form of these profitless janglings shall be multiplied, the

sooner will the body of Christians spue the unhallowed effusions of party zeal out of their mouths.

There seems to be a growing aversion to speculative theology, from a belief of its unprofitableness; the learning of the schoolmen is passing into oblivion or disesteem; and the intense anxiety which formerly prevailed to know what men *ought to believe*, is moderated by the desire of knowing also what they *ought to do* in order to please God. The whole of religion is assuming a more practical form, and it is no longer believed to be enveloped in all the mystery which the learning and zeal of the disputatious have thrown around it.

2. We have all the advantages which the history of the church is capable of affording to show the uselessness of sects, and their evil effects and tendencies. The experience of two hundred years is thus brought before us, and proves satisfactorily, how futile is the attempt to make a purer church by narrowing the terms of communion and membership, and thus compelling the believer to make a choice between opposing denominations, or to live without any visible communion with his fellow heirs of salvation. The history of two centuries has also furnished us with an ample view of the manifold and grievous evils which have resulted from the violation of the constitutional unity of the church.

3. We have not only the evidence that a portion, and a considerable and very respectable portion of the Christian community, have begun to see the necessity of a union between Christians of different denominations, but we have the strong and encouraging fact that an actual union has been formed for several important and valuable purposes, in the formation of the Boards of Foreign

and Domestic Missions, as well as the Education and Tract Societies, and the Sunday School Union.

4. We have evidence of a most pleasing and satisfactory nature of the harmonious faith of all evangelical Christians in every doctrine and practice that is of essential importance, in the nine volumes of tracts published to the world by the American Tract Society, containing a body of doctrinal and practical divinity of more value than all the human creeds, confessions of faith, and systems of theology which form the standards of any church on earth. The great and many truths embraced in these volumes, most clearly show how much of Christ and his salvation, and the duty of man to God and his fellow men, may be taught and preached without conflicting with the sectarian opinions of any denomination. The existence of these volumes of tracts of such a character is indeed a most remarkable fact; and it is matter of regret that they have not found a place in the library of every clergyman and of every Christian family in the United States.

5. May we not also derive encouragement from the alarm which is manifested by the advocates of sectarian division, and the measures which they have taken and are taking to strengthen the chains of sect? We do not intend to charge them with aiming simply at that object. They are doubtless moved by an honest apprehension that the signs of the times indicate a great revolution in the concerns of the church, which they fear will overturn established opinions and usages, and so open the floodgates of error as to confound truth with falsehood. This has been the ground of justification for the continued violation of the constitutional unity of the church during

the last two centuries; as though the Bible did not contain within itself the principles necessary to preserve the holy religion it reveals, and as though something of the wisdom of man exercised in contrariety to the wisdom of God, were requisite to guard the purity of the faith once delivered to the saints. The measures now in operation to fortify the walls of sect, need not be specified in this place, especially as they are distinctly seen by every observer of what is doing in the church. They have been prompted by the fear of disaster, from the very events and operations which we hail as the earnests of approaching deliverance for the church from its unholy distractions, and of gathering into one the whole family of Christ.

6. We derive stronger encouragement from the union of all opposers of religion against whatever deserves the name of Christianity. All the hosts of opposition are fast combining themselves into one army, to wage war against the Lord and his anointed. The church of Rome will soon, unless some sudden change occurs in the course of things, fold in its embrace Unitarians, Universalists, and Infidels. They see, or the malignant spirit that impels them sees, that they are ere long to contend with the united church of Christ, which is the object of their deadly hatred, and the wrath of the foul adversary is evidently great, apprehending that his hitherto undisturbed sway of the world is short. As the hosts of the grand adversary are mustering and concentrating their strength; it must either be in consequence of indications perceived by him of a formidable union of the army of the Lord Almighty, or it ought to be viewed as the signal and call for such a union.

7. There are evident tokens of a divine influence

upon the minds of Christians, which will not permit them to rest under the present state of unlawful and unnatural division in the church. One of the offensive forms in which the unchristian character of divisions between the followers of Christ is exhibited, is the exclusion of each other from the table of the Lord, because they are not of the same denomination. Some entire religious communities have acted upon this exclusive practice of close communion for ages, without having been disturbed by any doubts of its accordance with the Holy Scriptures. This state of the conscience was owing entirely to the state of feeling, for it is the want of correct religious feelings which has engendered most of the speculative or practical heresies which have troubled the church of Christ. The language of sect to every one that believes not and walks not with them in all things, is, "Stand by thyself; come not near to me; for I am holier than thou;" and, when addressing her own adherents, says, in reference to all other Christians, "Come ye out from among them, my people, and touch not the unclean thing."

But as soon as a spark of that universal love to mankind, which ought to reign in every heart, began to glow in the bosoms of Christians in England and America, and manifested itself in active efforts to extend the influence of the gospel, an assault was made on the throne of sect. It was accompanied with a conviction of the unscriptural character of the exclusive doctrines that had so long been sanctioned by the strenuous supporters of sectarian divisions. While Doctor Mason of New-York was writing his plea for open communion, with the view of proving to his own denomination the duty of receiving at their table every Christian of whatever church

he was a member, Robert Hall, of the Baptist Church in England, was preparing his book on the same subject, in order to press the same duty on his brethren. These two giants in literature and theology were moved at the same time toward the same object, each of them being entirely ignorant of what the other was doing or purposing to do. Both of these publications, powerful and conclusive in the principles they advocate, strike a deadly blow at the empire of sect; for although the authors, forcibly impressed with the utter incompatibility with Christian feeling and the constitution of the church, of the practice which excludes believers in Christ from partaking of his supper at the same table with their brethren, aimed only at the establishment of that truth, yet the premises upon which their conclusion is based, lead irresistibly to the further conclusion that the division of the church of Christ into independent sects, is unlawful and unconstitutional. That this was the legitimate conclusion to be drawn from these books was well understood by the discerning of even their own churches, and from that time neither of these two authors, good, wise, and great men as they truly were, was a favourite with his own denomination. The principles established in these publications are now operating in the minds of Christians on both sides of the Atlantic, and if they are, as we verily believe them to be, of the leaven of Christianity, they will sooner or later diffuse themselves through the whole mass of the Christian church. Their progress may for a while be retarded by the opposing influences brought against them, but ultimately, if they are from God, they must become prevalent. He will continue to press upon the minds of his people the truths

he has commenced to teach them, until they shall be understood, believed, and obeyed.

What other cause will be assigned for the fact, that notwithstanding the anxious efforts made to bind more fast the cords of sect, there is exhibited in many of the books and other productions of the press, on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as in the conversations of the most exemplary Christians, and every where except in assemblies for sectarian purposes, a growing intensity of desire that the partition walls in the church of Christ may be broken down? Who would not have been astonished a few years ago, at a public avowal like that recently made in the city of Durham, in England, of a plan for reuniting all the Protestant churches of Great Britain and Ireland, on the broad ground of the Trinity? What meaneth the offer of a premium by a Bible Society in one of our own cities at the south, for the best Tract on a closer union of Christians in their prayers for the spread of the gospel? In our religious newspapers we meet with frequent expressions of desire by Christian writers of the increase of brotherly love, and for an intimate union among the friends of God. Many of the published sermons of the day breathe the same spirit. They do not indeed advocate the abolition of sects, but they notwithstanding present us with strong evidence of an increasing uneasiness in the minds of Christians, under the existing divisions of the church. Two recent publications of an exalted Christian character do explicitly express the conviction of the authors, that the church ought to be restored to its original unity, and intimate their belief that the work is practicable. We would also mention another most important fact which

may not be known to many among even general readers. One branch of theological study in the university of Leipsic is *Irenics*, (things relating to peace and tranquillity,) the ultimate aim in which is the union of all sects and parties. How shall we account for all these indications, otherwise than by admitting the fact that the spirit of unity is at work on the hearts of God's people?

8. Another encouragement of a somewhat different character, is presented in the increase of general knowledge and its diffusion among the people. Much has been done of late in this country, but more has been done we apprehend in Great Britain, in this department of benevolence. Valuable improvements are now in progress which are giving a more universal spread to the blessings of intellectual improvement, and are greatly elevating the standard of education. We are happy to witness such noble institutions as "The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge," in England; and we hope that our own country will not consent to be left behind in this race of benevolent effort. The noxious plant of sectarian bigotry finds a congenial abode in the dark shade of ignorance, but droops and dies in the sunshine of intellectual improvement. The influence of knowledge to liberate the mind from the narrowness of sectarian prejudice, is the more apparent when we advert to the fact, that among pious laymen it is very rare to find a man who has acquired extensive information, and yet sets a high value upon the peculiarities of the denomination to which he may belong. But among the clergy this incongruity discovers itself more frequently; and this, when it does occur, may be attributed to his peculiar disposition, or the circumstances in which the

individual is placed. He may be naturally or from habit rigid or intolerant. His domestic or theological education and training may have been of a very exclusive character, and the scene of his labours may not have presented a favourable opportunity, or may have failed to improve his facilities for acquiring a more liberal cast of mind. He may be the pastor of a people who under a former incumbent have drunk in a sectarian spirit, and he may, through lack of firmness or some other cause, have become moulded into their views, instead of having ameliorated their state of mind; or it may be that he occupies a position in which the whole of his influence and consequence or emolument depends upon his being a high-toned partizan. But, as a general proposition, how easy is it at the present moment to gather into one society Christians whose minds are enlarged with general information; how much more are they now one in heart, counsel, and action, than those whose limited knowledge contracts their minds and precludes the entrance of liberal views and feelings. "Light in the understanding is the source of all reformations, the detector of all evils and abuses, the corrector of all errors and misconceptions." And "knowledge and liberality of sentiment almost uniformly go hand in hand."

9. All these indications, it is true, may fail, and we should not derive so much encouragement from them as we do, had we not "a more sure word of prophecy," of which we hope the accomplishment is near at hand, and the day of its fulfilment dawning upon the world. The fields seem to be whitening for the promised harvest. The fold of Christ is now broken into numerous divisions, but the time must again return when there shall be but one fold, as there is but one shepherd. The

church of Christ is now rent into parties, that envy and vex one the other, as Judah and Ephraim of old; but the time must come when Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. The watchmen on the walls of Zion are now, in the divided state of the church, each one speaking with his own trumpet, and oftentimes with the trumpet of contention and war; but the period must come when the sweet sounds of the gospel shall proceed harmoniously from all the preachers of that gospel, for thus saith the Lord of his church; "Her watchmen shall lift up the voice, and with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." The intercessory prayer of the Saviour is itself virtually a prophecy; for the Father always heareth him, and will perform his request; and he asks "that they all may be one as we are one." Hath the Lord spoken, and shall he not do it? It is also foretold that in the happy state of the world which is coming, "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." And again, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid." "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain." These and other prophecies of the like tenour are by some interpreted to apply to the church; but admitting that to be doubtful, can it be believed that the nations and the world of mankind out of the church will sheathe the sword of war and contention, while the church shall remain the victim of controversy and division? Will the world be reformed before the church? Then we may not call *Christians* the salt of the earth, but the *world* is the salt

of the church, and the city set on a hill, and the leaven to be diffused through the mass of believers. If the pacification of the world is to be effected by the children of God, is it to be supposed that they will exert their influence to hush the world into peace, and make no effort to establish peace and union in the church? A peace society for abolishing the practice of war has indeed been formed, and it has in its composition the spirit of Christianity, and embodies many of the best friends of religion; but while we express our fears that little will be effected towards stopping the effusion of blood, while war or division is raging in the bosom of the church, yet do we view the formation of this society as the earnest, with the means that are already in operation to restore, or the tendencies already in motion towards restoring union among Christians, that the reign of sectarianism is short.

The Lord has not uttered his prophecies with the view of exciting expectations which he does not intend to fulfil. He will perform all his promises, and verify all his predictions.

Yes, we can already perceive that the way is preparing for the Lord to bless the effort to collect his scattered friends, and encompass them with the bond of heavenly love, and clothe them with the beauty and strength of unity. The flight of the lottery system, upon the bare exposure of its evils, and the deep wounds exhibited by the monster intemperance, almost as soon as he was touched with the spear of truth, are the earnests of what God is waiting to do, as soon as his people are willing to act for the purification of his church from the evils that oppress her.

In fact, the throne of sect is evidently affected with

the symptoms of old age, and showing the marks of decaying power. Sect cannot breath the atmosphere of the nineteenth century, and is now employed in the vain attempt to generate by artificial means the atmosphere of a by-gone age, in which alone it can continue to live. Yea, if our vision does not deceive us, the flame is already kindled, which the breath of the Almighty will soon blow into so bright a blaze, that the dark age of sect will retire from it, as the shadows of night flee away on the approach of the sun.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEANS OF RESTORING THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH.

1. *Confession of the sin of division, and asking forgiveness of God* for our own sin and the sin of our fathers. — Why confess the sin of our fathers? Scriptural examples, and divine precept on the subject, and the reason of the requirement. 2. *Ceasing from unprofitable controversy.* 3. Returning to scriptural principles in licensing ministers and receiving church members. 4. Cherishing love to Christians of every denomination. 5. Labouring to elevate the standard of piety. 6. Encouraging the benevolent associations of the day. 7. Returning to the primitive mode of reading the Bible. 8. Cherishing the spirit of prayer appropriate to the times.

THE violation of the unity of the church has brought upon her a train of evils which is incalculable; and, as certainly as the words of the Saviour are true, that a house divided against itself shall not stand, so surely will the divisions of the church, unless healed, work out her destruction. But there is hope that the time of applying an adequate remedy is near. The Lord, in his wise providence, sometimes permits an evil to proceed to extremities, in order more deeply to affect the hearts of

his people, and to throw upon them the necessity of devising measures for a more radical reformation than would otherwise have been thought of. By such permission, he convinces men of the dreadful consequences of departing from his law; shows them their entire dependence upon him for light and strength, and constrains them, in the agony of their souls, to cry out, Help Lord, or we perish. In this way he prepares his wayward children to return to the path of obedience to his commands, and to follow the intimations of his providence. It was so in regard to the giant evil of intemperance. It had grown, and like the evil of division, it had grown with the countenance and co-operation of Christians, into such magnitude as to threaten speedily to sweep the church as with the besom of destruction from the earth. The friends of God then directed their eyes to him, and beseeching him in the earnestness of their souls to save his church and the world, asked him what must we do to stop the torrent of desolation? He heard their prayer, pointed to the principle of total abstinence, and has clothed that principle with a power which has excited the astonishment of the world.

The only remedy for the evils of sect, is the restoration of the church to its original unity. This reunion cannot be effected in a day, nor in a year. To propose an immediate amalgamation of all sects, under present discordant feelings and prejudices, would be unwise; it would be madness. The time has not come,—merely because the church is not prepared. She *ought* to be prepared *now*, but she is not, and never will be without the employment of means adapted to the end. The way may indeed be prepared without the agency of man, with the purpose of accomplishing it; for God may per-

mit the principle of division to pursue the course of its own tendency, until every sect is dissolved to its very elements, and then, what believers shall be left remaining, may be glad to unite on any terms, to enjoy the public ordinances of religion. But must we wait until the church is dissolved, and then begin to collect the elements and organize the church anew? Or is it our duty to employ the means in our power to save the church from dissolution? The Lord may, if it please him, without the use of human means, and without first permitting the church to be destroyed, dispose its members to restore its original unity; but this is not the ordinary mode of his operations. Whatever is wrong in the church, *he requires of his people to see and reform.* And will not excuse their neglect induced by their expectation that God will bring all things right without their agency.

Before we specify the means to be pursued in order to effect the reunion of the church, we beg leave to impress on our Christian readers the necessity of *coming to a decision* on the great and important points which we have discussed, of the unity of the church, and the unlawfulness and evils of division. While the minds of Christians are undecided on these subjects, we despair of any thing being done towards accomplishing the desired object. We have not the vanity to believe that the discussion contained in this work will be satisfactory to many minds whose own reflections had not previously brought them to the same conclusions. All we have hoped is that we may succeed in awakening a measure of attention in the Christian community, and induce some, perhaps many, to examine for themselves whether these things are so. If upon examination they find that we have the truth on our side, we may claim, and do claim

of our Christian brethren that they give it their full and cordial assent, to whatever results the admission of the truth may lead them. This request we know to be reasonable, and we cannot consent to have it refused.

We further beg of them not to be appalled by the difficulties and discouragements that may lie in the way of the proposed reformation. *Ne cede malis*, is a maxim of the ancients; and we believe the assertion may be made with perfect safety, that there is a remedy provided in the goodness and wisdom of God, for all the evils which afflict the church, and press her into the dust. Had Luther yielded to the difficulties which obstructed his course, in breaking away from the tyranny and abominations of popery, the reformation would never have been effected. If the spirit of Howard had sunk under a view of the appalling obstacles in the way of ameliorating the condition of prisons, his philanthropic feelings would have died in his own bosom, and the world would not at this day be blessed with the wonderful improvements which have been made in prison discipline. Had the advocates of emancipation and of temperance shrunk back from their work, at the view of the powerful impediments in their way, the chains of slavery would to this day have been as strong as ever, and the tide of intemperance would now have rolled unchecked and unresisted over the land. If the friends of civil liberty shall once yield to the conviction that the rod of the oppressor is too strong to be broken, then indeed shall the world be doomed to wear the chains of perpetual despotism. So if the friends of the church shall sit down in despondency, and refuse to move, because there is a lion in the way, then may we expect, speedily to hear the shout of victory from the opposers of religion. But

we hope for better things; and cannot permit ourselves to believe that the spirit which has been already enkindled in the bosoms of some, will fail to support them in their conflict with the difficulties that may lie in the way of re-establishing the church upon its constitutional basis. Obstacles equally formidable have been removed in other schemes of benevolence, and many which at first appeared appalling, have melted away at the bare touch of Christian fortitude.

I. The first act which, in our view, it would be proper for the church to perform, is *humbly to confess the sin of division, and ask the forgiveness of God.*

We cannot hope for any important reformation in the church, without a strong feeling of obligation on the part of her friends, to be active instruments in the hand of the Lord, to carry on the work which is required. This sense of obligation will not be realized, in the case before us, without a conviction of personal guilt, at all events of being partakers in the guilt of suffering the evil to continue in our own day. Who of us can plead not guilty to the charge of being at least accessory to the evils of division? We have all done more or less to countenance and uphold the dissentions that are tearing the body of our blessed Saviour in pieces. We cannot throw the whole guilt of division upon our ancestors, who first departed from the unity which ought to have remained for ever inviolate, any more than the present generation of slave holders can throw the whole guilt of slavery upon those who first introduced slaves into this country; or than the descendants of Adam can fix the whole guilt of the apostate condition of mankind upon him. "The Lord our God is a jealous God, visiting

the iniquities of the fathers upon the children," from generation to generation. The children may obtain relief from such visitations, if they repent of their sins, and return to the path of duty required *of them.* God threatens the people of Israel, in case they should disobey his laws, to scatter them among the nations, and to leave them few in number among the heathen. "But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart, and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God,... he will not forsake thee." And after having denounced against the same people the most awful curses in case of their disobedience, he adds, "when all these things are come upon thee, and thou shall return unto the Lord thy God, and obey his voice, according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thy heart and with all thy soul, then the Lord thy God will have compassion upon thee.... he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers, and will circumcise thy heart and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." Deut. xxx.

Whoever may have been first in the transgression which has placed us in a condition that is morally wrong, it is our duty to escape from that condition without delay. And as we are not afflicted for the sins of our fathers without some participation in the guilt, we are bound to make acknowledgement to God, and implore his forgiveness. We must, besides, exert ourselves to undo what is wrong, for this is the only true test of sincere repentance. It will not avail us to lament the evils

of division, unless we resolve to employ the faculties God has given us, and the means within our reach, for removing them. While, therefore, the moral evil which commenced with our fathers, continues to the days of their children, the guilt of the past and present generation becomes (so to speak) commingled, involving both in one common transgression, for which the displesure of God is continued until the offence be removed. It was upon this ground that Josiah, king of Judah, when he heard the words of the law which had well nigh been forgotten, rent his clothes, and exclaimed, "Great is the wrath of the Lord against *us*, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book." And God, by his prophetess, tells Josiah, "I will bring evil upon this place and upon the inhabitants thereof, because *they* have forsaken me." While Josiah confesses the guilt of the present inhabitants of Judah, as well as the guilt of their fathers, God denounces his wrath against the present generation, for continuing in the transgression of their fathers. Josiah turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul; he evinced the sincerity of his repentance, by immediately setting about the work of reformation, and he received for himself the forgiveness of God. The people seem to have given only a feigned concurrence with the pious efforts of their king, and to have persevered in the evil course in which Manasseh, their former king, had been very conspicuous; for it is recorded, "The Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal." And accordingly, we find that Judah soon after became tributary to the king of Egypt. 2 kings, xxii. xxiii.

But when, in the days of Asa, who reigned some time previous to Josiah, the people sought the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with their whole desire, and seconded their king in restoring obedience to the commands of God, the Lord was found of them, and gave them rest round about. 2 Chron. xv.

A great reformation was likewise brought about in the reign of Hezekiah. That was also commenced with confession of sins, with supplications for pardon, and the aversion of God's wrath. Hezekiah addressing the levites says, "*Our fathers have trespassed*, and done that which is evil in the eyes of the Lord; . . . wherefore the wrath of the Lord was upon Judah . . . . Now, therefore, it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce anger may be turned away *from us*." And he exhorts the priests and levites to diligence in the work of reformation required of them. Also in the letters of invitation to the solemn passover which was afterwards held, he says, "Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God; . . . and be not like your fathers, and like your brethren which trespassed against the Lord; . . . . but yield yourselves to the Lord, . . . that the fierceness of his anger may turn away from you." The priest and the people entered with the heart upon this work of reform, and their prayers were heard, and the blessing of God descended and rested upon them. 2 Chron. xxix. xxx. xxxi. When, at another time, Ezra became acquainted with the unlawful intermarriages of his Jewish brethren with the heathen, and learned that the hand of the rulers and princes had been chief in the trespass, he rent his garment and his mantle, plucked off the hair of his head and his beard,

and sat down astonished. He fell upon his knees, and spread out his hands unto the Lord, and said, "I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers, have we been in a great trespass, even unto this day." He repeats the command of God upon that subject, and confesses the manner in which it had been broken, and the justice of God's displeasure and wrath against the people. He evinced the sincerity of his humiliation, by instantly commencing the work of reform, and persevered therein until it was completed.

It is always an unpleasant office to charge guilt upon our fellow Christians, even when we confess our own share in it; doubly unpleasant is it in a layman to prefer a charge including ministers of the gospel, who are entitled to respect and reverence for their superior knowledge and piety, and the sanctity of their office; it is still more unpleasant to prefer a charge of guilt against our parents and ancestors, whom we are in the habit of remembering with the greatest reverence. But we find that the martyr Stephen, who was full of the Holy Ghost, did not hesitate to declare the truth to his countrymen, members of the Jewish church, including the elders, the scribes, the high-priest, and even their ancestors,—"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, *as your fathers did*, so do ye." Acts vii. 51. And the Saviour himself brings one common charge of guilt against the Jews and their fathers. Matt. xxiii. 32. Luke xi. 47, 48. It is not intended to assert that we and our fathers, guilty as we are and have been of the sin of schism, are chargeable as were the Jews of enmity against God or the truth. Far from it; but all sin is odious in the sight of God, the

sins of his children as well as those of his enemies; the sin of David as well as the sin of Saul; and both alike deserve the displeasure of God, and require humble confession with prayer for pardon.

But what is it to us, it may be asked, that our fathers in the church have sinned as well as we ourselves, by living in a state of sectarian division? The question might be answered by inquiring why Asa, and Josiah, and Hezekiah confessed the sins of their fathers as well as their own, and why the Saviour and Stephen did not content themselves with charging sin only on their own contemporaries? Neither of these, surely, were deficient in respect for the dead, and especially for their own deceased ancestors. Another answer may be found in Leviticus xxvi. where the Lord having warned the children of Israel, that in case they shall despise his statutes, so that they would not do all his commandments, he would send upon them plagues and judgements, and desolations, so that they should pine away in their iniquity, and also in the iniquity of their fathers; he yet adds a gracious promise of relief and restoration, "If they shall confess their iniquity *and the iniquity of their fathers*, with their trespass which they have trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me, and that I have also walked contrary unto them." The Psalmist acts up to this requirement, when deprecating God's wrath from Israel, he says, "We have sinned *with our fathers*." Ps. cvi. 6. The God of Israel could take no pleasure in hearing the accusation of children against their progenitors; but he knows the hearts of men that they are deceitful above all things; he knows the proneness of his fallen creatures to justify their own delinquencies and transgressions, by pleading the exam-

ples of their fathers. He foresaw that where the same transgression should have continued from age to age, not only the natural respect the children have for their fathers, but their disposition to justify themselves in their own course of conduct when sanctioned by the example of their ancestors, would be sufficient to stifle any inceptive conviction of sin which might come upon them. He knew they would be reluctant to accuse their fathers even in their own minds, that they would desire to justify them, and if they should be able to believe that the fathers were right, it must follow that the children doing only the same things must themselves be free from the imputation of guilt. Had not God made it necessary for the Israelites to confess the sins of their fathers as well as their own, how easy would it have been for the subjects of Asa, of Josiah, and Hezekiah, as also the cotemporaries of Ezra and Nehemiah, (see Neh. ix. 3,) to have stopped the mouths of these reformers by telling them, "in charging us with sin, you accuse our fathers also, for we are walking in their steps;" and thus the attention of the people would have been drawn from their own sin, to the supposed impiety of those who irreverently accused their progenitors of having been wicked transgressors of God's law. God therefore has wisely required, in order to break one of the strongest cords which holds men to their sins, that where the fathers and children have been involved in the same transgression, those who desire to evince their repentance and receive forgiveness, must confess the sins of their fathers as well as their own. Not that God cannot or will not pardon the true penitent when he confesses and forsakes his own sin, but he knows that there can scarcely be a deep conviction of

guilt, or an honest disposition to make confession of it, without a willingness to honour God by an acknowledgement of the whole truth, whoever may be implicated with the transgressor in the sin he confesses. The value of this requirement was evident not only in the instances already alluded to of Ezra and others, but also in the time of the Saviour, when the Jews had wrapped themselves in a complete panoply of self-justification, impenitence, and unbelief, by pleading the traditions of the elders and the examples of their ancestors in whose steps they trod, and to whose opinions they adhered; and for this reason it may be that Jesus Christ and Stephen bring their fathers under the same condemnation with their descendants.

The propriety of the divine requirement, that the children should confess the sins of their fathers as well as their own, where they are involved in the same transgression, is strikingly exemplified in the state of feeling actually existing among the various denominations of the church at the present time. Each has its long list of ancients, who have contended for the same doctrines, practised the same rites, advocated the same form of church government, and sanctioned the same principle of division. Until we admit the errors of our fathers, how can we feel a deep conviction of our own, or make a full and honest confession of our guilt. Is it intimated to us that we are living in a state of unlawful division? or do our own reflections, while reading or meditating on the word of God, make the same suggestion to our minds? we instantly and instinctively answer, "We walk in the steps of our fathers; they were wise and holy men; and we have no disposition to charge them with having violated the constitution of the church, nor do we

pretend to be wiser or better than they." It is much easier to defend what is wrong, by pleading the examples of our fathers, than it is to defend it on the principles of reason. Says one of our missionaries in India, "Were I to preach for five days to an assembly of common people, and with the strength of argument and the earnestness of Paul, the whole impression which I should be likely to make, might be done away by a single word from a Brahmin, who should ask them, if they were going to give up the religion of their fathers." And thus we make our respect for the dead the cloak to cover our own sins, and to stifle all inquiry concerning them. How many are there of professing Christians as well as others, who act the same unfaithful part toward God and themselves in regard to the temperance reformation! They refuse to give any ear to the call of total abstinence, comforting themselves in that they have the example of their good and wise fathers to countenance the habitual use of distilled liquors. We have reason to thank our merciful God that he has inclined some in the spirit of scriptural requirement to confess that we and our fathers have grievously sinned in this thing. How much of the success of the temperance reformation is to be attributed to this confession, is known to Him who requires confession to be made in this form.

Christian brethren, let God be true and every man a liar. Let us deal honestly with God, with the church, and our own consciences. We and our fathers are verily guilty of violating the constitutional unity of the church, of rending the body of Christ asunder, and thereby emphatically crucifying him afresh in the house of his friends; of cherishing the spirit of controversy, contention, jealousy, envy, and hatred among the mem-

bers of God's household; of fostering the spirit of party pride, bigotry, and intolerance; of grieving the Holy Spirit by our divisions and contentions; of perpetuating errors of doctrine, and closing the door against any general reformation in the church; guilty of strengthening the hands of opposers, of retarding the latter day glory; yea, of weakening the church, and bringing it near the verge of desolation. We of this generation are indeed more guilty than our fathers. They had not the evidence which we have of the evils of division, nor had they the favourable time which we enjoy for reflection. We have been and are busily employed in repairing, strengthening, and raising higher the partition walls, which God was crumbling down and evidently indicates his design to demolish. It surely becomes us to adopt the language of Daniel in his memorable confession recorded in the ninth chapter of his prophecy. "We have sinned and committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgements.... O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face.. and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. Yea all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing that they might not obey thy voice.... and he hath confirmed his words which he spake against us... by *bringing upon us a great evil*... Yet we made not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand thy truth. Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil and brought it upon us; for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works which he doeth, for we obeyed not his voice..... O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy moun-

tain; because *for our sins* and the sins of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people have become a reproach to all that are about us.... O my God, incline thine ear and hear; open thine eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name, for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies; O Lord, hear; O Lord hearken and do; defer not for thine own sake, O my God; for thy city and thy people are called by thy name." Daniel ix. 5—19. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. How appropriate is this prayer of the prophet to the present condition of the church of Christ, and how becoming to its members would be the deep humility which he manifests in his confessions of the sins of the people and their fathers; of their unworthiness, and his appeals to the mercy of God, and his regard for the city and people that were called after his own name.

Independently of the preceding considerations, it becomes the church to cherish the spirit of humility. The passage of Scripture, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble, though often quoted, fails, we fear, of making its legitimate impression upon our hearts. The spirit of party is the spirit of pride, and while it is fostered by the contentions of varying sects, it diffuses itself more or less through all the affairs of the church, even those with which sectarian feelings have apparently little or nothing to do. It seems quite difficult to frame the narrative of a revival of religion, or of some good measure of success that has followed the labours of a Missionary, without exhibiting or illy concealing something of a boastful spirit, either as it regards

the instrument employed, or as it regards the denomination, or the party in the subdivision of the denomination to which he belongs. We would not wish to repress a single emotion of joy over one sinner that repenteth, but let not this joy be mingled with the unholy feelings of selfish or sectarian exultation, nor make us unmindful of the slowness of the actual progress of religion and the numbers and power of the enemies of true godliness. A glowing narrative of success by one denomination or society, may provoke a coloured representation of facts by another which is its rival. These contests, so to name them, must be very offensive to God, as they are the derision of the enemies of religion. They must in their effects retard the ultimate success of the gospel, and keep alive the unholy passions of party pride on one side and of jealousy and envy on the other. The triumphs of temperance, even, have been sung in too high a strain of exultation. Christian brethren, let us not conceal the truth from ourselves and others; we cannot conceal it from our God, nor can we alter the actual state of things by putting a veil over our own eyes or the eyes of our fellow men. The number of professed followers of Christ has indeed greatly increased of late years; but what progress has been made in producing the fruits of the spirit, peaceableness, gentleness, brotherly love, honesty, purity, sobriety, moderation, meekness, self-denial, and humility? Party zeal may swell the number of nominal converts, but party zeal cannot ensure the production of the fruits of the spirit in those who are baptized in the name of the party. Let us confess and feel that the standard of piety is low, notwithstanding the great numbers that have been added to the various divisions of the church. Indeed we are over-

loaded with nominal professors of religion, under which many denominations groan and are sorely burdened, insomuch that Christianity has become so much amalgamated with the world, that the world cannot discern the difference between themselves and Christians, and it requires much of that charity which hopeth all things to support the actual friends of Christ in the belief that the greater portion of what is gathered into the garner is not chaff. The cause of foreign missions progresses, indeed, but how little has been done! The cause of domestic missions and of tracts is advancing, yet little is accomplished in comparison with the power of the Christian community. The enemy are collecting their forces and uniting their energies. In a very few years we may see infidels, universalists, heretics of every description, the sceptic and the hater of religion making common cause with the church of Rome, to trample every protestant denomination in the dust. The divided, distracted state of protestant Christians, one envying and opposing the other, will make them an easy prey to such numerous and powerful foes as seem preparing to unite against them. Surely it becomes all who love the Lord Jesus Christ to walk softly and humbly under present circumstances and indications.

We presume the reader has not failed to see the bearing of the measure we have just recommended, upon the object sought to be accomplished. Without the blessing and help of God the evil of schism will never be removed; and he has appointed self-abasement and confession as one of the indispensable means of procuring his pardon of the sin, and strength to recover from its deleterious effects. Besides, the frame of mind pre-supposed in making sincere acknowledgement of guilt, is of

primary importance to prepare men for salutary effort.

II. *Let Christians cease from unprofitable controversy.*

Were the followers of Christ duly convinced of the unlawfulness and evils of division, and of the guilt consequently resting upon them; were they humbled under a sense of the low standard of piety, and of the danger of still greater depression, arising from the multitude of worldly professors constantly increasing through the efforts of party zeal; and were they fully aware of the crisis which seems impending from the signs of a speedy union of all the enemies of the church, they would surely be willing to give a truce to all hostilities against their own friends and natural allies. They would abstain from all unprofitable controversy, tending to keep alive the remembrance and the feeling of opposition between brethren of the same household of faith. How long shall we continue to agitate doubtful and perplexing subjects, which have been controverted for centuries or ages, and which remain as far from being settled as ever? Think you that Jesus Christ can be pleased with those endless and diversified disputes which alienate the hearts of his people from each other, and prevent them from living on terms of brotherly love and unity? How do Presbyterians like the controversy now carried on between the disciples of the old and new school, and the disputes respecting new men and new measures, which disquiet that denomination, and threaten to tear it asunder? Are the Congregationalists any better pleased with the profitless discussions between the disciples of Taylor and his antagonists? How do the Episcopalians relish the disputes between high

churchmen and low churchmen; and the Methodists and Baptists those which are distracting their denominations? We ask not how the parties who are employed and whose feelings are engaged in these disputations relish them, for the sound of the trumpet of war is always grateful to the soldier who pants for honour or victory in the field of battle; but we ask how do these dissentions affect the hearts of those who would gladly see their brethren of the same denomination walk together in love and unity, and who deprecate a schism in their body as a deplorable calamity? Of such we doubt not there are many in every division of the protestant church; and to such we say, depend upon it, brethren, that Jesus Christ is as desirous of preserving peace and unity among all his followers, as you are to preserve these blessings in your own religious community; and he is as much displeased with any controversy which produces or continues schisms in his body consisting of all believers, as you are with those disputations which distract your own denomination. No matter whether these endless controversies are kept up in books, magazines, newspapers, or tracts, or in the pulpit, the lecture-room, or the family, they are all, as we verily believe, highly displeasing to the great Head of the church, who desires all his people to be one, and to be of the same mind, and to speak the same thing, and who has given us, in the Holy Scripture, abundant store of doctrines and precepts in which all Christians are substantially agreed, and which are able to make all wise unto salvation.

Let these disputations cease, at least until Christians shall have recovered from those sectarian feelings so unfavourable to the exercise of an impartial judgement

upon the truths of God's word, which are the subjects of controversy; and if they shall then appear of sufficient importance, let the discussions be renewed in the spirit of brotherly love, and honest inquiry after the truth. Let there be peace, at least now, among the soldiers of Christ, while the hosts of our natural enemies are thickening upon us, and when we have so much to do, to fortify the position of the church, as well as to carry the war into the enemies' country. Baxter, in his Saints Rest, quotes from another, "that the lovers of controversy have never been warmed with one spark of the love of God." Though we do not unite in the sentiment, we cannot forbear to express the opinion that it is plainly a mistaken application of intellectual power to employ it, at the present time, in polemical disputations, calculated to widen or keep open the breaches between God's people. This, we have reason to believe, is felt by numbers who are sighing for the peace of Jerusalem, and who fully respond to the sentiment expressed by the late Mrs. Hannah More: "My very soul," said she, "is sick of religious controversy. How I hate the little narrowing names of Arminian and Calvinist. Christianity is a broad basis. Bible Christianity is what I love; that does not insist on opinions indifferent in themselves — a Christianity practical and pure, which teaches holiness, humility, repentance and faith in Christ; and which, after summing up all the evangelical graces, declares that the greatest of these is charity."

Should there be a much longer continuance of the controversies that are now carried on in the church, the danger is that men will presently turn away in disgust from the discussion of any doctrine in the Bible. Indeed it is doubtful whether this feeling does not already,

in some measure, begin to prevail. This would be a serious evil, prejudicial to the cause of truth, but it would ill become the lovers of controversy to complain of it, when they are themselves the authors of the evil.

The tendency of Christianity is to peace and unity. Controversy is the aliment of sectarian feelings. It is evident, therefore, that the bare cessation from unprofitable disputation, must act directly upon the restoration of Christian union.

III. Let us *return to scriptural principles, in licensing ministers, and receiving members into the church.*

When these sectarian controversies shall have subsided, which, as it is intimated by Mr. Abbott, in his Young Christian, (a popular and excellent work) are mostly on speculative points, not touching the essential doctrines of Christianity, nor the important duties we owe to God and our fellow men, it will be easy to introduce into the churches a more catholic principle in licensing ministers of the gospel, and in the reception of members. A candidate for the ministry ought to be measured by the standard of scriptural qualifications, and not by rules of human invention. He may not be rejected because he cannot pronounce the shibboleths of party. If he gives evidence of his love to God and precious souls, he ought not to be required to give proof of his attachment to any particular denomination of Christians. If he show a capacity to win souls to Christ, and edify believers, who has the right to inquire how far he will advance the interests of any sect? If he be qualified to preach to Christians of one sect, he is qualified to preach to Christians of every sect. If he be not qualified to preach for every denomination, he is not quali-

fied to preach for a ny. If he may be lawfully refused by a bishop or presbytery under the banners of Paul, he ought not to be licensed to preach in the sect of Apollos; for Christ is not divided. If he believes the essential doctrines of Christianity, confessing the faith once delivered to the saints, he ought not to be required to subscribe to every article of any human creed. Any man or body of men assuming the right to license ministers of the gospel, who proceed on any other principles than these, depart from the example of Christ and his apostles, however faithfully they may adhere to rules of human invention. They act not on the ground of the Scriptures, but adopt a standard erected by fallible men, violating the principles of the Bible. They refuse licenses to men whom the Saviour and his apostles, and the primitive Christians would not have hesitated to license. They act on principles which, if generally adopted, will perpetuate the divisions in the church, and render its reunion impossible, and so it will fall an easy prey to its enemies.

In the reception of members into the church, which is the household of Christ, the regulations which he has established as the head of the family, are to be observed, and not any rules which may have been devised by any portion of that family, when opposed to, or unwarranted by those which he has ordained. He received all who believed on him, and who exhibited that the love of Christ had been shed abroad in their hearts, by the regenerating influences of the Holy Ghost. We are warranted by the Scriptures to reject from the family of Christ such as do not exhibit the character of children, either in their outward walk, or by denying such of the truths of Christianity as that the denial will afford pre-

sumptive evidence that the love of Christ is not in them; what these doctrines are, there is no difficulty in determining from the Scriptures, unless the difficulties arise from sectarian prejudices and habits. The apostles and their disciples acted on the same principles with the Saviour himself, and Paul expressly directs the Romans, chapter xv. 7, to receive one another, as Christ also received them; and this direction seems to refer to every form of reception which one Christian can give to another, and not to exclude the manner or spirit in which they are to be admitted into the church. The principle we advocate is so much in accordance with the entire scope of the New Testament, that we need not to be solicitous to prove that the passage just quoted has a direct reference to the reception of members into the church. There is no doubt of the ground on which Christ and his apostles, and the primitive Christians admitted men to the privileges of membership. They were received not because they belonged to Paul, to Apollos, or to any party of believers, but simply because they were believers in Christ. No suggestions of human wisdom, predicated on the divisions actually existing in the church, can be of any weight to establish new rules of admission, because these divisions are in themselves unlawful and inadmissible by the constitution of the church. Christ now receives men as his children, and will admit them into heaven, although they differ from us on minor points of doctrine, rituals, and government. And cannot we receive into the visible church those whom we believe Christ receives into the invisible church, and will admit into heaven? There is no church on earth as holy as heaven, and we cannot be sure that those who differ from us now, will, after their

admission into heaven, be converted to our creed or form of worship. It is for the individual believer to make his choice of that church of which he will become a member, and if he is willing to hold Christian fellowship with us who differ from him, we ought to be willing to hold fellowship with him, although he differs from us. We may not thrust him from us because he agrees not in all things with us. As he seeks for Christian edification and comfort, in the same portion of Christ's family with ourselves, we ought not to treat him as a stranger, for he is a child. We must always remember that Christ is the head, and not we, of his household; and we have no right to frame rules to exclude one of such as he receives, unless we can plead his warrant for the measure.

A return to the primitive scriptural practice of licensing ministers, and admitting members into the church, will place in its proper light the jealousy which is often manifested when converts to the faith of Christ find their way into some other denomination than our own. If indeed their choice of another sect would throw them into a den of wolves or tigers, it might be worth much anxiety and pains to prevent the calamity; but if it be in truth a Christian community into which he is received, in which he will be fed with the bread of life, though it may in *our* apprehension be not quite so nutricious as our own, it seems not to present an occasion of deep mourning, and certainly should not awaken in us the feelings of jealousy or envy. Were this subject viewed in its proper light, we should not witness those efforts to electioneer members into churches, which has excited the grief of the sober Christian, and the derision of the unbeliever; which has filled the church with nominal

professors, turned back in disgust many an inquiring soul, hardened the hearts of the careless, and given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

Let us be willing to admit that other communities of Christians have the same right to claim peculiar excellencies with ourselves, since they have had and still have among them the wise and the good. And while the divisions in the church continue, let us leave the young convert to choose, without molestation, to what denomination he will attach himself in order to enjoy the ordinances of God's house, as perhaps he would, after all, make a wiser choice for himself than we would make for him. Other sects than our own may indeed assail him, prejudice him against ours, and give false colours to the excellencies of their own. This then is their error and sin; and let us not make ourselves partakers in the same transgression, and betray the same littleness of spirit, by adopting measures to counteract such interferences; remembering that in a contest of this kind, both parties are likely to be actuated more by the spirit of carnal strife than by a regard to the truth, the good of the individual, or the glory of God. The laws of self-defence have no application to these inglorious struggles for victory, and we practise gross imposition on ourselves, when we hope to be governed in them by principles worthy of the gospel of Christ. God only knows whether any of the existing denominations of Christians have any decided advantage over their brethren; for our partisan feelings do not admit of our discerning the excellencies of others, and even if we did discern them, our party regulations do not permit us to adopt them into our system. Hence we see the necessity of pursuing such a course of measures, as will tend

to soften the asperity of sectarian feeling, before the Christian community will become fully persuaded of the folly and sin of sectarian divisions and contentions.

The training and then licensing ministers for particular denominations, and the training and receiving members with the same view, is what fortifies sect, and operates against Christian union. Let more liberal and scriptural principles guide the churches in these matters, and much will be gained towards setting ministers, church officers, and private members, loose from their sectarian partialities, and make room for the growth of more liberal feelings.

IV. *Let us cherish the feeling of love to all Christians.*

We should not only be anxious to remove out of the way whatever produces or cherishes alienation of heart from our fellow Christians of other denominations, but should sedulously cultivate in our minds the feeling of love towards them; calling to our aid the powerful reasons and motives urged in the Holy Scriptures for the exercise of this affection. We should remember the bond of union by which all Christians are connected together by the command of our Saviour, even as the members of the human body are united to constitute one perfect man. All depend upon one another; — nor can one say of the other, I have no need of thee, and I will not belong to the same body with thee. How preposterous were it, should one of the eyes refuse to hold the corresponding place in the head with the other, that did not at times direct itself to the same object of sight, or perform the office of vision with the same perfection; or for one of the arms to withdraw from its companionship with the other, that had less of comeliness or strength than itself.

The mutual dependence of Christians united as members of the same spiritual body whereof Christ is the head, should inspire them with love to support, nourish, and encourage one another in their conflict with Satan, the world, and the corruption of their own hearts.

We should remember too that while Christians of other denominations are less sound and comely in our eyes than ourselves, we appear to them in the same light that they do to us. All in truth have their imperfections, blots, blemishes, and erroneous opinions, for it is not in man to be perfect. Yea, if we could see with the eye of omniscience, we should see that there is no soundness in *us;* that in us there dwelleth no good thing; that our very righteousnesses are filthy rags, and our hearts a cage of unclean birds. Yet we pray that God would be patient and forbearing towards us, forgive our sins, love us, hold communion with us, yea, walk with us continually, supporting us when we wake and when we sleep, in health and in sickness, in the day of prosperity and in the day of calamity, and we expect that he will do so, because he has graciously promised that he will. But we are as much bound to forbear, love, and help to hold communion, and walk with our brethren in Christ, as God is to do so unto us. His promise is no more imperative upon him than his command is upon us, and there is surely as much reason that we should obey his commands, as that he should perform his promise. Nay, more so, as his command upon us is unconditional, and his promises are made oftentimes, if not always, under the condition expressed or implied that we perform the corresponding duty to our fellow-men. Who will obtain mercy from the Lord Those who are merciful to their fellow-

creatures. Who will obtain forgiveness of their sins? Those who from the heart forgive others their trespasses. Will God then bear with our infirmities, errors of opinions or practice, if we will not bear with our brethren in their imperfections? Will he love us, who are in truth almost entirely unlike to him, when we do not love our brethren, who are in almost all things like unto ourselves, and differ from us in only a few particulars? The only ground on which God can exercise the love of complacency towards us personally, is, that he has imparted to us a small portion of his own moral image, and of this image he has imparted a portion to every believer. He can see the marks of his own image on every one that is born of the Spirit, and so could we, if we were not blinded by our partial judgements. Nothing tends more to obscure our perceptions of God's image in others, than the blinding influence of sectarian prejudice. The Christian graces shine very obscurely in those who are not of our own way in all things, for we magnify their faults and underrate their graces.

The apostle John, in his first epistle, says that he who loveth his brother abideth in the light, but "he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, *because darkness has blinded his eyes.*" 1 John ii. 9, 10, 11. He useth the expression "hateth his brother," in the same sense as not loving him, 1 John iv. 20, 21, where he says, "If a man say, I love God, and *hateth* his brother, he is a liar. For he that *loveth not* his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this command have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also." We cite those passages for another purpose, beside that of pro-

ving that not to love one's brother is to hate him; namely, to show that he who hopes to maintain good evidence of his love to God, must manifest love to his Christian brethren.

What then is love? It is the opposite of hatred, and certainly very different from the feeling of aversion or even indifference. We all know what is love, when exercised towards parents or children, brothers or sisters of the same family. It is our love to them which makes us tender of their good name, and moves us to extenuate or cover their faults, bear with their differences from us in taste, habits, opinion or behaviour, and desire their company, notwithstanding bodily or even moral blemishes and deformities. How different is this from the feelings we entertain towards brethren who belong with us to the same household of Christ, but who have not adopted the same sectarian name. Such is the blinding influence of sect, that many openly avow the sentiment that they cannot walk with Christians of another denomination. They acknowledge that the asperities of sect ought to be softened, but they insist that the partition walls must remain, and they deem it quite enough that the wall should be so far lowered as that those on the opposite sides may shake hands over it. This is now quite a popular conceit among the apologists of sect; but what does it mean, except it be that Christians who do not see all things in the same light, must not step over the wall, and embrace each other, nor even walk in company; that they can at most give a hearty shake of the hand, and must then retreat mutually from the wall, lest a stay might produce a quarrel, or at least unpleasant sensations? Is this the exhibition of Christian love? Is this Christian fellowship? Is

this walking together, as becometh the children of God? Where is the warrant from the Scriptures, to limit our love to any portion of our brethren? We must indeed avoid evil communications, and not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners; we are commanded to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing; but we are nowhere cautioned to avoid intimate fellowship with the saints in whom dwelleth the spirit of sanctification, lest we should be corrupted with their imperfect or erroneous apprehensions of doctrine, nor are we apprized in the Scriptures of the danger of mingling with the actual sheep of Christ, lest we should be bitten or devoured by them. The command is general to all Christians, to please their neighbour for good to edification; to have fervent charity among themselves, charity which shall cover the multitude of sins, which hopeth all things, believeth all things, and beareth all things. The saints are commanded not to forsake the assembling of themselves together; not that the followers of Paul must meet for prayer, praise, and edification, with the admirers of Paul, and the friends of Apollos with those who entertain the same preferences; but there must be no such divisions among them.

We have already said that God's promises to us are in many instances, if not generally, on the condition express or implied that we perform the corresponding duties to our fellow-men; and among our fellow-men, those who are believers in Christ, have an emphatic claim upon us. "Do good unto all men, especially to the household of faith." Our Saviour tells us to pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." In the spirit of this prayer, we ought

to ask of God to forbear with us, in our errors of opinion or practice, as we forbear with our brethren in their differences from us; to walk with us notwithstanding our many short comings in regard to his requirements, even as we walk with our brethren, notwithstanding their failure to come up to the measure of our standard; to manifest his love to us, notwithstanding our manifold blemishes and perverseness, even as we love our brethren, notwithstanding the unlovely traits in their character. Christian brethren, can we pray in this spirit, so long as we treat as strangers, not to say as opponents, those who are believers in Christ as well as ourselves, because they cannot in all things see with our eyes, and understand with our judgements? Would not our prayers, if expressed in the language of our feelings, be as follows? "Forbear thou with us, although thou seest in us so much that is contrary to thy mind and will; but excuse us our unwillingness to bear with our brethren, in whom there are a few things contrary to our mind and will." "Manifest to us the tokens of thy love, notwithstanding that we are covered with sin and pollution; but ask not of us to exhibit much affection for those in whom we observe a few spots and blemishes." "Walk thou with us, be on our right hand and our left, notwithstanding that we are so unlike thee; but demand not of us to remove the partition wall which we have erected to separate us from those of thy children who are in a few unessential particulars unlike ourselves: we cannot walk with them; we cannot speak with them of the common salvation; we cannot endure to hear the preaching which edifies them; we will not practise our religious rites, nor administer the govern-

ment of the church in the same house with them, although we confess that their bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and that the Father and his Son Jesus Christ dwell in them, and delight to hold communion with them."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEANS FOR RESTORING THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH, CONTINUED.

5. Labour to elevate the standard of religion. 6. Encourage the benevolent associations of the day. 7. Return to the primitive mode of reading the Scriptures. 8. Cherish the spirit of prayer appropriate to the times, especially for a more devoted and more efficient ministry.

V. *Let Christians labour to elevate the standard of religion.*

When the disciples of Christ shall have been baptized into the spirit of brotherly love, as required in the Scriptures, they will be in a better state of mind to understand the design of God in establishing a church upon earth, and constituting it one and indivisible. Mankind stands arrayed in two great divisions; the seed of the serpent on the one side, and the seed of the woman on the other. The first is headed by Satan, the prince of the power of the air, who worketh in the hearts of the children of disobedience; the latter is headed by Emanuel, king in Zion, who designs to subdue all nations to himself, and

bring the whole world under his spiritual dominion. To accomplish this work, he employs his church, composed of all believers, into each of whom he has infused a measure of his own Spirit, and with so vast a conquest to achieve, they have no time to lose; for while they loiter, Satan drags his thousands and his millions to hell, and then exults in the smoke of their torment, which is ascending for ever and ever. It is unbecoming the character of those who are the followers of the Prince of Peace to fall out by the way; and it is subversive of his design to rid the world of its tyrant, that they should waste their time and energies in fruitless controversy among themselves, when all their strength and all their resources are required to conquer and subdue the great enemy. The weapons of their warfare are not carnal but spiritual; and they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Unlike other soldiers, they are to conquer not by destroying the enemies of their Prince, nor even by injuring them, but by doing them good, and winning them over to his side. The mode in which they are to accomplish it, is by showing them the sin of rebellion against their lawful Sovereign, proclaim the terms of pardon and reconciliation, and denouncing the doom that awaits them, if they refuse to submit to the offer of mercy. In the accomplishment of this great enterprise, while the Holy Spirit is the efficient agent in subduing the hearts of his enemies, he employs the instrumentality of men who have themselves been brought to the obedience of the gospel, and expects them to use the means which he has himself appointed, and which, in his wisdom, he has adapted to the end to be accomplished. He requires the

united efforts of all his friends; to each of whom he has given a talent or more, which they are bound to use for his profit, under the penalty of receiving, in case of disobedience, the retribution of a wicked and slothful servant. Every Christian is a servant of Christ; and he has work to be performed by every one of them; suffering no one to stand idle, without administering to him reproof, and urging him on to labour.

The nature of the service required of Christians, demands that they make in their lives an exhibition of the excellency of their principles, that the world may behold in them a contrast to their own, and perceive with a single glance the superiority of the religion of Christ, even as the light of a candle in the darkness of night can be perceived at once by the eyes of a beholder. Their character must present not only the shining qualities of light, but also the durable and preserving quality of salt, to preserve the world from corruption. Their affections and efforts must not be confined to the limits of a congregation, or the bounds of a sect, but their benevolence must embrace the whole human family, and the effects of their benevolence must be diffused, like leaven, through the whole mass of mankind. They should manifest their supreme love to God by evincing their readiness to forego any of its possessions and enjoyments, if thereby they can advance the extension of his kingdom. They ought to show their affections to be in heaven, by soaring above the maxims, customs, and follies of the lovers of the world. It ought to be apparent to those who observe their conduct, that they are seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; in all their dealings, they should practise strict honesty, as in the sight of God. They should owe no man any thing, not living above their income, not contracting debts which they

have not the prospect, upon prudent calculation, of discharging; and avoiding entanglements and hazards in their business, they should escape those insolvencies which so often wreck the character of the Christian professor, and injure the cause of religion. Nor should they be partisans in those political excitements which, however they may be in character for those who do not habitually look beyond this world, are not becoming those who profess to be pilgrims and strangers in the earth. They ought to show their superiority to the selfishness of ungodly men, and their consequent quarrels and contentions, by living, as far as is possible, peacably with all men.—It is necessary *above all things that they have fervent charity among themselves.* "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

It is only by a faithful exhibition of Christian character, that the light of Christians can so shine as to have a converting influence upon sinners. This stands prominent among the means of grace ordained of God to convince a gainsaying world. So long as Christianity is merely or mostly represented to them as a theory unsupported by the lives of its professors, they find little difficulty to evade its claims upon them. They judge of the theory by the exhibition of it made by those who pretend to have embraced it; and when they observe many who in their works deny it, or manifest a spirit much below its holy requirements, why should we wonder that the unbelieving sinner, instead of glorifying God from the exhibition made of religion by its professors, should take occasion to blaspheme his name, and contemn his cause?

The direct way to reunite the church of Christ, is to

elevate the standard of religion. This is of much greater importance than an increase of numbers. What avails the multitude of servants, when they refuse to do their master's work; or the multitude of soldiers, when they decline the toils, privations and dangers incident to the life and duty of a soldier? Of what value are those disciples who spend their lifetime in learning the requirements of their teacher, but are never ready to reduce them to practice? How few are there of the multitudes admitted into the church, who understand the nature of their calling, if we may take their actions as a true exhibition of their attainments in knowledge.

To what cause must we ascribe the low state of religion among professors of the gospel? Making all just allowances for the remains of corruption in the hearts of believers, and the influence of the world, and other temptations that seduce them from a life of godliness, much of the prevalent defect of Christian character and conduct must, we apprehend, be attributed to the partial and injudicious system of teaching and training adopted in the churches. There are many honourable exceptions, which we do not design to include in our remarks, and whose example we wish were generally followed. We speak of the mass of congregations in this country, at least as far as our information extends. Great pains are in many instances taken to make what are called good Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, or Baptists, but how little, in comparison to its relative importance, is done to make men faithful soldiers of the cross, and faithful labourers in the harvest of the Lord? In the reception of members into the church, much more of anxiety is manifested to ascertain what they believe, than what they do, or what they

design or are willing to do, for advancing the interests of Christ's kingdom. Such is the influence of the sectarian spirit which mingles itself with all the concerns of the divided church, that the laborious self-denying duties of Christianity are thrown into the back ground, seldom brought into view, and then in a manner betraying feelings of little or no interest. Ministers have not courage, or they have not the zeal animating them to inculcate openly and fearlessly the vanity of an empty profession, and to point out in what it consists. They deal in generals, when they ought to descend to particulars. Not that we would desire (for we deprecate most earnestly) that rudeness of reproof, personality, and censoriousness, which is inconsistent with the gentleness, prudence, and charity, inculcated in the Scriptures. A public teacher may be plain, particular, and pungent, upon the Christian duties of benevolence, diligence in the work of the Lord, self-denial, deadness to the world, honesty, purity, humility, forgiveness of injuries, and the like, without being rude, personal, or imprudent. Jesus Christ and his apostles, as well as John the Baptist, in the public addresses, as well as the private discourses they delivered, were less urgent on matters of faith not immediately connected with practice, than our public teachers, in these sectarian times. They insisted more on duties, and the points of faith inseparable from those duties; and in their instructions they were exceedingly plain, giving to each class of persons, and in less public discourses, to individuals, their portion in due season. John the Baptist preached the doctrine of repentance, insisting with his hearers on the performance of those duties which evince the actual exercise of repentance. He was pointed in his instructions, direct-

ing the publicans to cease from false accusations, the soldiers from violence and discontent with their wages; and admonishing the people generally to throw off their selfishness, and impart liberally to the wants of others. He demands that every tree bring forth its appropriate fruit, or that it would be cut down and cast into the fire. Luke iii. 9 — 14. It needed no metaphysical discussion nor formal definition, at that time, to explain what was repentance; nor is it needed now, for the nature of the duty has not changed since the days of John the Baptist, and never will. The Saviour is equally plain and pungent. There is no misunderstanding his injunctions and requirements; he employed no intricate and complex demonstrations, nor such generality of application as to admit of exceptions according to the taste or inclination of the individual. The preaching of the apostles was of the same character, and that of all these was in harmony with the prophets who preceded them.

We are not the advocates of new men or new measures unwarranted by scriptural authority; but we deprecate the squeamishness, the generality, the indistinctness of modern days, in the inculcation of Christian duties. It is from this cause that there is upon the minds of professors of religion so little sense of the obligation to perform the duties clearly taught and imperatively enforced in the Bible. You see it in the general neglect of those duties. You hear it in the discourse of Christians, which, when not directed to matters of a mere worldly nature, is much more on matters of controverted belief and the externals of religion, than on the duties enjoined upon them as the friends and servants of the Lord, and as brethren to each other. It is as

every one knows, much more easy to move a church to exercise discipline towards one of its members for an error of opinion, though of a controverted and unessential character, than for *even the habitual* neglect of essential duties clearly enjoined in the Scriptures. Were Christians taught differently, and were this teaching supported by proper discipline, administered with Christian love, with patience and perseverance, the standard of piety would soon be raised higher; the light of Christianity would shine on every side; the wickedness of the unbeliever would be rebuked by the walk of the believer; the salt of the earth would regain its savour, and the leaven of Christianity would be diffused all around, until it should leaven the whole world. The children would generally receive instruction from the fountain of wisdom, the Holy Scriptures; the rising generation would grow up a host for the service of the church of Christ; labourers would be qualified and sent forth in the employ of the Lord of the harvest; the means of grace would be furnished to the destitute in Christian lands, and our seamen would be converted into messengers of salvation to distant countries. Religious tracts would be put into the hands of every reader; the Bible would be found in every family; the pure gospel of Christ would be preached to every creature, and the knowledge of the glory of the Lord would fill the earth as the waters cover the seas. The means to accomplish these glorious objects would be cheerfully furnished from the abundance which God hath, at this day, so signally showered upon the Christian world. Our benevolent institutions would be amply supported, and would flourish, moving on to the accomplishment of their noble designs, without exciting the opposition, the envy, or the

jealousy of religious denominations. As the system of religious teaching shall be reformed, the power of Christianity upon the hearts and lives of its professors will reappear, the attachment of men to their sectarian peculiarities will consequently decrease, and the obstacles to the reunion of the church will melt away.

VI. *Let us encourage the benevolent associations of the day.*

That it is the duty of Christians to evangelize the world admits of no dispute. That it will ever be accomplished by the divided church, there is no reason to hope. She cannot even keep pace with the increasing population and consequent wants of our own country, and what will she do with the rest of this wide world? Nothing was done by the church in this country to carry the gospel to the distant heathen, prior to the formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; nor was any thing worthy the name of an important effort attempted towards sending the gospel to the destitute in our own country before the organization of the American Home Missionary Society. These associations were formed by Christians who saw the necessity of breaking away from the chains of sect which had so long held the church in bondage, and deprived her of the power and the will to obey the commands of a risen Saviour, and to extend the bounds of his dominion. They aim at the universal spread of the gospel of salvation, and that freely, as it is announced in the Scriptures. To sustain them in their operations, they need all the countenance and pecuniary assistance which it is in the power of Christians in America to afford. Being as catholic in their principles and measures as the condition

of the church has hitherto admitted, they present strong claims upon several denominations, if not upon all American Christians, for their cordial and vigorous support. They need men, preachers of the gospel, teachers of schools, physicians and mechanics, to answer the purposes of their organization; nor will those purposes be answered until the nations and people coming within the scope of their operations, shall be civilized, and brought under the influence of the gospel of Christ.

To furnish these societies as well as the churches in this country with competent ministers of the gospel, it is found necessary to afford the means of a suitable education to pious young men who have not the means of educating themselves. For the accomplishment of this object the American Education Society was formed, a society in its principles and operations entirely catholic, and which excludes not students of any religious denomination. They have now under their care several hundreds of young men, of various creeds, with the view of training them for the service of any of the churches that may require their ministry, and with the hope of sending many of them into the missionary field.

But the wants of the world demand a more rapid increase of preachers of the gospel than can be furnished by means of the Education Society, without securing a more efficient education to children prior to their admission into its care. To supply this defect, as well as to extend the benefits of a religious education to all the children of our land, the American Sunday School Union was formed. In this institution there is nothing of a sectarian character, the Scriptures being the fountain of instruction recommended by those who conduct its concerns; but as they are unwilling to refuse their aid to any

Christians, and are cheerfully desirous of imparting unto all the advantages of their union, they admit as auxiliaries any societies of Christians, although they may prefer instruction from their catechism to instruction from the Bible itself, and therefore even sectarians have no ground of objection to the plan and general objects of this society.

That much neglected class of men which navigate our merchant vessels and ships of war, are now receiving the kind attention of another benevolent society, called "The Seamen's Friend Society," which claims kindred with no particular sect of Christians, but appeals for its support to the humane and pious feelings of all, without distinction of party. Here is one class of our fellow beings, who are in measure supplied with the rich and abundant means of grace without any thing like sectarian organization. Preachers of all denominations are invited to preach to the poor seaman, who needs as pure and heavenly food for the salvation of his soul, as does the landsman; and no one acquainted with the religious concerns of seamen entertains a doubt but that the bread and water of life is in truth administered to them. Here is an institution which commends itself to the conscience, the affections, and efficient support of all Christians, except such as can see no charms in any thing that advances not the peculiar interests of his own sect. We rejoice in the patronage given to this society, while we grieve that it touches not the feelings and secures not the prayers and contributions of every Christian.

The American Bible Society deserves and receives a great degree of patronage from the Christian community. Publishing as they do the Bible without note or

comment, it cannot be supposed to meet with opposition from any but infidels ; and it is in fact loved by all Christians who are acquainted with its nature and its operations, except only those who are offended with every thing upon which they cannot see the stamp of their own sect. And yet it is true that there are multitudes of believers in every part of the land who are not sufficiently acquainted with this noble institution to enlist them in its support ; from some others it receives occasional and scanty contributions ; and it is limited and often embarrassed in its efforts for want of a uniform, constant, and liberal support from American Christians. Surely our continent ought not now to be unsupplied with the Holy Scriptures for the want of funds ; and if the means of affording the supply shall not be furnished in a short period, it must be attributed to some other cause than the want of merit in the claims of the society.

The American Tract Society is another benevolent institution worthy of the nation and of the Christian religion, scattering the leaves of salvation at home and abroad, with as liberal a hand as the means furnished them will permit. The matter of their nine volumes of tracts, besides their numerous other publications, every one will admit to be excellent and abundant, affording food to the Christian soul under all its varying circumstances, and urging upon the sinner the great and important duties God requires of him, presenting to him every motive which can be supposed to influence man as a reasonable and accountable being. They teach and inculcate the great and essential doctrines of salvation in a manner that cannot offend the sensibilities of any sectarian, save him who is displeased with every sound that pronounces not the shibboleths of his party. And yet

there are many churches that exclude from circulation among them the publications of this truly excellent and benevolent association in order to give exclusive room for the party tracts of their own denomination. These not only fail of helping to increase the resources of the national society, but withhold from it through the force of party prejudice many a contribution which would otherwise be made to its funds.

The Prison Discipline Society is also most truly humane in its principles, and happy in the results of its efforts. Much has been done by it to ameliorate the condition of the prisoner, as well as to make his imprisonment the means of reforming his character by keeping from him the means of grosser corruption, and by supplying him with mental, moral and religious instruction. Much has been done to elucidate the causes of crime, and something we hope to guide the legislator and philanthropist in the effort to prevent its increase, and even to diminish its amount. This society has, moreover, been the means of bringing glory to the cross of Christ, by exhibiting the power of religion upon some of the most depraved of the human species, and by affording striking illustrations of many of its truths. This society does not indeed require much of the personal efforts or contributions of Christians, but it needs the good will and the prayers of all; and the privilege of sustaining it, ought to be coveted by all the benevolent, instead of permitting that privilege to be enjoyed by an inconsiderable number. These last remarks apply also to the Peace Society, and the Temperance Society, which are both truly benevolent in their objects, and ought to command the co-operation of every community, and their

prayers that the benefits of their principles may be realized by themselves and the whole world of mankind.

Although none of these societies have a direct aim at reuniting the distracted church of Christ, but design only to promote each its appropriate and avowed object, they do all of them actually form a bond of union to a greater or less extent between Christians of various denominations ; and in their associations tend directly to cherish those feelings and principles which must become more generally prevalent before the tyrannic power of sect can be broken, and Christianity liberated from its thraldom. And until the time shall arrive when public sentiment shall be sufficiently corrected to sustain institutions with the like object, of a character still more catholic, those now in operation present a strong and imperative claim to the warm and vigorous support of every friend to the reunion of the church. We therefore cannot refrain from earnestly recommending the cheerful and liberal support of these benevolent associations as one of the principal means of restoring the constitutional unity of the church, as well as of elevating the standard of religion in the Christian community.

The claims of these liberal societies are, however, evaded or resisted by many who may be very honest in their opinions, but whose judgements appear to us to be evidently perverted by the force of sectarian prejudice. It is gravely argued and thousands yield to its force, that as every church is connected with some denomination, every one who becomes a church member thereby proclaims before God and the world that the denomination to which he belongs is in his judgement better than any other in existence, and that therefore he is bound to do all in his power for that denomination, otherwise he denies his

own profession. That is, if there be a Bible society in his own denomination which circulates the Bible with notes and comments, (or with other accompaniments, showing the sense which his own sect puts upon the word of God,) he must bestow all he has to spare for the Bible cause, upon that society; and what then is left for him to give to the American Bible Society, which distributes the Bible alone, and that without note or comment? Or if the sect to which the Christian belongs has its tract society, which contends earnestly for its peculiar views and tenets, he must give every dollar he has to spare for tracts to his own society, and not a cent to the American Tract Society, which publishes only such scriptural truths as receive the assent of every Christian mind and heart, and meddles not with the peculiarities of any division of Christians. The theory may sound very well when we address only those of our own denomination, and forget that the church of Christ is one, or when we neglect to notice that by our own reasoning we are imposing on Christians of other denominations, duties directly opposite to those we prescribe for our own. When our views are diverse, there is error on the one side or the other. If *my* becoming a member of the Reformed Dutch church imposes on me the duty of supporting a tract society of that church, which holds the doctrine that infants ought to be baptized, and whose tracts contend for the same, *your* becoming a member of the Baptist church imposes on you the duty of supporting a tract society of that church, which denies the right of infant baptism, and whose tracts vindicate that denial; and both are brought under obligation to give exclusive support to his own society, and to withhold all aid om a tract society occupying the ground which is

common to us both. We know not how there could be a more striking illustration of the pithy question of St. Paul to the Corinthians, "Is Christ divided?" than the opposite duties which are thus imposed on Christians by the bare circumstance of a sectarian distinction between them. One of them is in error, but he is bound by the laws of sect, to do all he can to defend and to propagate his error. Why? Because, says the sectarian, if it be an error, it is the error of my own church. *Your own church*, Christian brother? And is not my church your church, and your church mine? Then is Christ divided indeed, and St. Paul's idea of an indivisible church was visionary, and the Saviour spoke words without meaning, when he prayed that his disciples might be one, even as he and the Father were one.

If every church member is bound to do all he can for the institutions of his own denomination, upon whom must devolve the support of our great institutions of benevolence? Almost exclusively upon the impenitent and unbelieving, for we apprehend there are but few believers who have not made a profession of religion. Is the Christian public then prepared to sanction a doctrine which tends directly to the destruction of these noble charities, and thus to wither the hopes of the benevolent in this hemisphere?

These institutions have been further assailed on the ground of their being mere voluntary associations, not constituting a church, and having therefore no ecclesiastical responsibility. Would all sects unite, organize one church, and, in their ecclesiastical character, undertake the distribution of the Bible and of religious tracts, suppress evils, reform what is amiss, and convert the world, most gladly would we see these voluntary associations

yield their places to a better organization. But this we do not expect to see until the way shall have been prepared for the reunion of the church, by the means which God in his wisdom and goodness may lead his children to adopt. And in the mean time we cannot conceive of a more happy scheme to forward the great objects of Christian benevolence than these voluntary associations of men taken from all the considerable denominations of Christians. As Christian men, pursuing Christian objects, they acknowledge and feel their responsibility to Christ for the faithful execution of their trust, to as great a degree, certainly, as any single denomination of Christians can do. They feel their responsibility also to their fellow Christians, and to their own consciences, while they recognise the best of all standards, the Bible, as the rule and measure of their responsibility. They have thus far given ample evidence of diligence and fidelity in pursuit of their several objects, and have not excited the suspicions and evil surmisings of any except the open enemies of religion and the victims of sectarian jealousy. What bodies of men can there be in the present state of the church better adapted to the ends to be attained, than these societies? They have received, and justly deserve, a much greater degree of confidence from the Christian community at large, than would any single denomination of believers, how ecclesiastical soever their organization may be.

The conversion of the world is a matter in which all Christians have a common interest; and as there is no such thing as a separate interest subsisting in different sects, it is immaterial which of them shall accomplish the work. Christ will be entitled to all the glory, and the church of Christ will receive the benefit resulting from

its accomplishment. Let then every Christian banish the narrow views of sect, and embrace in his affections the whole family of mankind. Let him give his heart, his hand, and his purse, to the support of that stupendous scheme of benevolence, that has no limit to its extension except that of the globe we inhabit, and which fails in its object so long as one of its inhabitants is unreclaimed from sin and hell. This we urge as one of the happiest and most important means for elevating the standard of religion in the church, and the sure way of restoring her constitutional unity. Ministers and lay Christians will thus become workers together, with God, to free the world from the dominion of Satan, and establish the kingdom in his hands whose right it is to reign in the earth. They will learn more perfectly, in their own experience, the nature and blessedness of that religion which urges and helps to the performance of every Christian duty. The terrible evils which afflict the church will soon be removed, the graces of God's people shine forth in all their beauty, and the latter day glory be speedily ushered in.

We will direct a moment's attention to the manner in which the general support of our benevolent institutions will produce such wonderful changes in the character of churches and of individual believers. The Christian cannot grow without suitable exercise. His faith is strengthened more by obedience, than by hearing, reading, speculation or meditation, and his hope becomes established more by exercise than by self-examination. His humility will not grow so much by abstract reflection, as by practising the self-denying duties of the gospel; and his selfishness will yield less readily to reasoning on God's right to his time, labour, and property, for

the advancement of his cause and the good of mankind, than to actual and repeated drafts upon his purse, and demands on his time and labour for these objects. His love to God will increase as he is ministering to the temporal and everlasting wants of the creatures of His hand, and his love to mankind will grow warmer in his bosom as he witnesses their necessities, and employs the means to relieve them. A sense of his own unworthiness and insufficiency will then only grow upon him, when he shall in earnest set about the performance of every required duty. It is in vain to exhort men to grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ, unless the Christian graces are kept in constant exercise. Every Christian must have actual work assigned him. There is something for every one to do for the benefit of others, and then it will be found, as surely as the word of God is true, that while he is watering others, he will himself be watered in his turn.

Were every congregation, as it might be, an efficient auxiliary to the Bible Society, there would be no difficulty to ascertain who are destitute of the Bible at home, or to supply them with it; and how easy would it then be to awaken attention to the destitute in other places, and secure the feelings and contributions of Christians to the parent Society, and enable them to send the bread of life to the destitute in every part of the world who are perishing for want of it. Were every congregation an efficient Tract Society, the same results would follow in regard to that blessed charity, in the circulation of tracts. Many hands would be profitably employed in distributing them; and all whose hearts can feel would cheerfully contribute their share to furnish a supply at home and abroad. In like manner might every church sus-

tain its part in the missionary enterprise, learning at the same time to appreciate more adequately the value of the blessing which they themselves enjoy, by the very employment of spending their time, money, and pains, in sending it to others. Every congregation might and ought also to perform its share in educating the pious poor, to prepare them to preach the gospel, since the harvest is truly great and the labourers few; and to impart to all the children the benefits of Sabbath school instruction. The cause of seamen and of prisons, as well as the cause of temperance, ought also to have secured for them a warm reception in every church. Attention to these various objects, and to every benevolent work that may present itself, would furnish employment to many professors of religion who are now sitting idle, and rusting under their accustomed means of grace, wrapped up in self, pursuing the world as though it were the sole object of their desire, and disgracing, instead of adorning, the profession of godliness. All this is practicable too; and those ministers and church officers who have made the experiment will admit and rejoice in testifying that in proportion to their faithfulness in promoting these glorious charities, all the concerns and interests of the individual congregation have become more prosperous; the minister has been more esteemed and better sustained in all things; peace and brotherly love have been promoted, and all the Christian graces brought into lively and profitable exercise. The few churches which are actively engaged in the support of these charities, have to sustain a severe struggle in resisting the worldly and sectarian influences of those which surround them, and partake not of the same spirit. Oh! could our ministers and congregations once hold up each other's

hands, and stimulate each other to still greater exertions for the glory of God, and the good of mankind, instead of pursuing a course which tends to lower the standard of religion wherever the attempt is made to elevate it, what blessed and abundant fruits of the Spirit should we not witness in the church of Christ!

But all this is not to be effected by the bare formation of auxiliary societies, and an occasional, timid address. As much pains at least ought to be taken to indoctrinate Christian disciples into these matters of important, indispensable duty, as it has been customary to take in order to shape them into the belief of abstract, speculative, controverted articles of faith. It appears to us that the duty of supporting our benevolent charities, all aiming at and tending to the conversion of the world, is at this day as plain as the duty to love our neighbour, to clothe the naked, and feed the hungry; and the reason why they are not generally understood is, that the public teachers of religion do not enforce them upon the consciences of their hearers with earnestness and perseverance. It is seldom that our congregations are reminded that there is a world lying in the darkness of heathenism, Mahometanism, and popery, and that every Christian is bound to do his part in converting the world. In many places the subject perhaps is never mentioned, except to the small numbers assembled at the monthly concert. The minister either wishes not or dares not to inculcate it as a duty upon his parishioners, to bestow their money upon any objects without the limits of their own congregation; and if that duty is pressed at all, it is by the agent of some society, who, when he attempts the task, soon finds that he is addressing ears unaccustomed to such sounds, and appealing to hearts unprepared to re-

ceive his doctrines or answer to his calls. Even the minister who feels no opposition to benevolent associations excuses himself from advocating their claims, on the ground that they have their agents, whose superior knowledge and skill in their respective agencies enables them to solicit contributions to better advantage than the pastor of the congregation. But herein an important matter is forgotten. The agent has not time in any place to give much instruction. He may and does state facts, and adduce reasons; but to warrant the expectation of success, he ought to have the advantage of appealing more to facts already known, and to feelings previously formed, than to facts disclosed and feelings to be formed at the time. In other words, he cannot at the moment give consciences to his hearers, but must address himself to consciences already formed, or he appeals for the most part in vain. The consequence of the neglect of this duty on the part of the pastor is, that agents generally receive contributions only from those individuals whose minds are prepared to give, by information received through the medium of the press. This is well understood by the agents, and for that reason they seldom think of troubling the minister to call a meeting of his people, and content themselves with presenting their object to those few who receive the religious papers, or who may be known to be favourably disposed.

This is not as it should be. The expense and labour, or rather the profit and pleasure of supporting these blessed charities, ought not to be borne and enjoyed by a small number of the professed followers of Christ, while the rest are left to pursue the business of the world, as if that were the only thing needful. The doctrine that what we contribute towards benevolent objects

is but a portion of God's own property, lent to us for the very purpose of doing good therewith, and that it is more blessed to give than to receive, can be made familiar to every Christian mind. Every individual, before he thinks of being received into the church, ought to understand it to be his duty, as it is his privilege and his honour, to bear his part in propagating the gospel. But how few of our churches would venture to inquire of an applicant for church-membership, whether he is in the practice of contributing his time, money, or labour, to send the Bible, the tract, or the gospel, to the destitute, or to aid the other benevolent societies of the day. Such questions would by most be deemed imprudent or impertinent, merely because the duty is not inculcated in the catechism or from the pulpit, or in pastoral visits. Why is it not? Because the command to Christians to convert the world has been thrown aside as a dead letter, ever since the reign of sect has been established. The broken church has aimed no further than to sustain the ordinances of religion at home, and has not been disturbed by the wailings of the millions that have annually dropped into the lake whose fire is never quenched.

We are aware that the want of time is often pleaded as an excuse, even by those ministers of the gospel who appear favourably disposed towards the charitable institutions of the day. Much time would be saved by many of our spiritual teachers if they should pay less attention to speculative and polemical theology; and avoid the discussion of those points which have torn the church into fragments, without any adequate compensation. We admit that so long as the duty of supporting these charities does not press itself on the conscience of the pastor himself, it may cost him much time and labour to

argue the matter forcibly with his people; and where his zeal is checked by the fear of giving offence to his hearers or others, it may be difficult for him so to urge the duty as to impel to action and at the same time to avoid giving offence. But it cannot cost the herald of the cross, who fears God more than men, whose soul is burdened with the weight and value of immortal souls perishing by millions for lack of vision, much time or labour to demonstrate the duty of every Christian to give his aid to save his fellow-immortals, and to show the advantages, in a temporal and spiritual view, of giving their assistance in every work of benevolence. Although there are many objects of Christian exertion, and to some the care of one of them may be more than he is willing to assume, yet whoever makes the trial and shall have taken under his care every one of these charities, will find what is experienced by every father of a family who puts his trust in God, that as his children increase, the means and facilities of maintaining them are multiplied; and that however numerous they become, not one of them can be spared. While indeed we regard these charities as strangers, the support of them will be burdensome; but as soon as you receive them into your bosom and dwelling it will constitute your pleasure to provide for them all.

VII. *Let us return to the primitive mode of reading the Scriptures.*

To prepare the way for the abolition of sect, it is indispensably necessary that we read the Holy Scriptures as they were read in the primitive ages of Christianity. The constant and prayerful reading of the Bible, and the whole of the Bible, is the principal means of preserving an harmonious faith among believers. In the pre-

sent condition of the church, we have as many standards of doctrinal belief as there are denominations of Christians; and so long as the present idolatrous attachment to these human standards continues, Christians must always remain divided in sentiment and action. They cannot read the Bible in simplicity, because they read it in the light of the standards of the church of which they are members; and differing as those standards do from one another, what is light to a Christian of one denomination, is darkness to his brother of another denomination. It was not so in the primitive ages of the church. They allowed no other standard of faith or practice than the inspired writings; and the Reformers who had been taught of God the sufficiency of the Scriptures, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to enlighten and sanctify the Christian, believed "that the doctrine of the Bible is most perfect and complete," and being fully persuaded of the fallacy of the popish doctrine of the rule of faith and judge of controversy, they taught that "neither may we compare any writings of men, though ever so holy, with those divine Scriptures; nor ought we to compare custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times, or persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself."

This is in perfect accordance with the dictates of sound reason, and is sanctioned by the Saviour himself. How solicitous was he to guard his disciples against receiving for doctrines the commandments of men, and listening to the traditions of the scribes and elders! Did he not forbid his disciples to call any man their master, on the ground that they had but one master in heaven?

He alone has the authority and wisdom to govern the judgement of his rational creatures. We may not call any man or body of men our masters, and it is the privilege, as it is the duty of every Christian, to exercise his own understanding as to the meaning of the Scriptures. He must indeed humbly seek to have his understanding enlightened by the Holy Spirit, or he will be sure to err. But God has pledged his veracity to give wisdom to every humble inquirer who seeks instruction from him, while he has nowhere promised that those shall become wise who learn upon their own understanding, or upon the understanding of ministers, fathers, or ecclesiastical councils. "They shall be *all* taught of God." Not *some* taught of God, and the rest by them; but every one shall have his teaching immediately from God. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God." Whoever feels his lack of wisdom, is not only permitted, but commanded to ask of God, and the promise follows that "he giveth liberally unto all." He must ask of *God*, not of the church, or human creeds; not of God through the medium of the church, or any confession of faith, but immediately of God, and the promise is of a personal teaching by God himself, through the Scriptures.

If divine teaching be necessary, it is our duty to give up ourselves *wholly* to it. We must be willing and desirous to receive what light the Spirit offers to our minds. The Spirit teaches "through the word," not contrary to it; nor does he make any new revelation beyond the Scriptures. It is indispensable that a man, when he gives up himself to divine teaching, and ever after, should be willing to yield preconceived notions and opinions. He must become like a little child, feeling his

ignorance, believe that his Father knows all things, and is willing to instruct him and to guide him into all truth. Let it not be supposed that by yielding himself to the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the word of God, the Christian will expose himself to be tossed about with every wind of doctrine. If it were quite uncertain whether God is willing to teach the humble inquirer, or whether he will teach any thing but the truth, there might be some ground for the apprehension; now there is none. Where then is the danger? Why a man may mistake his own fancies, or the dreams of another, for the teaching of the Holy Spirit of truth? So he may, and he ought to be the more earnest in his prayer to be delivered from all delusion and error. But can there be a better or more certain way of attaining to the truth, and holding it fast, than God himself has pointed out in his own word? And why must a man who yields himself to the teaching of the God of truth, be tossed about with every wind of doctrine? Is the Bible so obscure and contradictory, as that men, without a human standard of interpretation, must needs be groping in the dark, remain unsettled, and be the sport of every wind that blows? The danger of such a result arises from man's natural lack of wisdom and holiness; and what better means can a man employ to become holy and wise, than by yielding himself to the guidance and teaching of the Spirit of holiness and wisdom? Once more: What have they to establish them in the faith, who are fearful of being deceived, should they yield themselves to the teachings of the Spirit? Nothing, but the opinions of fallible men.

The objector may ask, Are there then no truths of religion which may be considered as settled? Yes, there are

many; indeed *every* truth taught in the Bible is settled and fixed, even as God has declared it. Some points of doctrine are to be found in all creeds and confessions of faith which Christians in general are agreed in receiving as true. This fact we may regard as affording prima facie evidence of the accordance of those doctrines with the oracles of God. But as to those doctrines, stated in the creeds of man's formation, upon which Christians differ, and on which the wise and the good are opposed to each other, how can they be deemed, by any portion of the church, as settled, except in the personal conviction of the individuals concerned. These points have never been adjudicated by a lawful judge of controversy. A council of Presbyterians, all will admit, is not a lawful judge of controversy to bind an Episcopalian; nor is a council of Calvinists competetent to bind Arminians. Even among those who belong to the same church, there is no lawful judge of controversy to determine any point of dispute on matters of religious belief. One man or a hundred men cannot believe for an individual of the same church. Each man must believe for himself; and as he is responsible to God for the correctness of his faith, he may not rest his belief on the opinion or adjudication of any man or body of men on earth. This principle does not subvert the right of a church to deny admission, or to expel from its communion those men who deny the faith once delivered to the saints, and embrace damnable heresies. We speak only of those matters upon which it is admitted that the wise and the good among the children of God hold different sentiments; and in reference to them, we aver that there is not even prima facie evidence which of the discordant opinions is correct, and of course every man must believe upon the strength of his own conviction.

It is only by returning to the primitive practice of searching the Scriptures, with reliance on the teaching of God alone, that the *watchmen* shall ever "see eye to eye." Under the prevalence of party pride, it is a point of honour among the contending sects which shall yield any portion of their opinions. Each adheres to his own, and of course, one or other must be perverting the Scriptures, to sustain their discordant creeds. The Holy Spirit alone can give men to feel the necessity of sitting more loose to their respective tenets. He can make them willing to stand still, throw aside all animosity, all pride of opinion, all desire of maintaining the mastery, and with ingenuous hearts to inquire "What does the word of God teach?" He can incline them to believe that on some points of difference, their adversaries may, after all, be right. He can breathe upon his children the fulness of his influence, and inspire them with that *freedom of soul*, which will enable them to rejoice in prospect of the triumph of truth, whether the result of that triumph be the establishment or the refutation of their own opinions. Then free and candid discussion, in the spirit of truth and meekness, will take place of proud and bitter controversy, and will be *blessed* to the increase of light, holiness, and love.

The effects resulting from the general and constant reading of the Bible, the whole Bible, freed from the partialities of sect, and with humble prayer for the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, will not only melt away the shibboleths of party, but will bring to the view of Christians the indispensable importance of being constantly employed in the active, self-denying, and benevolent duties of Christianity. Every important truth and duty will thus be brought to the

mind and contemplation of ministers and private Christians, as every part of the Scriptures shall be read in course by them, and studied. Had this been the general practice in ages past, the evils which now oppress the church of Christ, could never have attained their present magnitude, nor have been of long continuance. The Bible contains within itself the means of keeping the church free from corruptions, and of purifying her from them, when they have been permitted to come upon her. Of this truth the adversary is fully aware, and he exerts his utmost skill to keep the Bible from those who have it not, and to keep those who have it from the constant, prayerful reading of its precious contents. He has instigated the papal church to withhold the Scriptures from the laity, and virtually to lock it up from the eyes of the priesthood. He has been too successful in our divided protestant church, to turn the attention of Christians from the simple reading of the Bible, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to our creeds, confessions of faith, systems of theology, sectarian commentaries, and metaphysical speculations, to the subversion of the pure faith and practice of the gospel.

We beg leave to close this head with an extract from a late work. "The study of the Scriptures, in their native simplicity, and without the intermixture of the technical language of theologians, and of party opinions, would be of vast importance in religion. It would convince the unbiassed inquirer how little foundation there is in the Scriptures themselves, for many of those disputes about metaphysical dogmas which have rent the Christian world into a number of shreds and patches, and produce jealousy and animosity, where love and affection should have appeared predominant. He would

soon be enabled to perceive that the system of revelation chiefly consists of a series of imporant facts, connected with the dispensations of God towards our race, and interwoven with a variety of practical and interesting truths, and that the grand design of the whole is to counteract the effects of moral evil, to display the true character of Deity, to promote love to God and man, to inculcate the practice of every heavenly virtue, and to form mankind into one harmonious and affectionate society. He would find none of the technical terms and phraseology which the schoolmen and others have introduced into their systems of theology, nor any of those anathemas which one sectary has so frequently levelled at another, applied to any one, excepting to those who do not love our Lord Jesus in sincerity."

VIII. *Let Christians cherish the spirit of prayer, appropriate to the exigency of the times.*

We specify only one more of the means we advise to be pursued, in order to bring about the reunion of the church; and that is to cherish the spirit of prayer, not merely in the general sense of the expression, but of prayer particularly appropriate to the time in which we live. One of these appropriate subjects of prayer, obviously is, that the contention in the church may cease, and that the intercessory prayer of the Saviour, that his disciples may all be one, may be speedily answered, in the prevalence of brotherly love and unity. As the means of accomplishing this result, we should pray most importunately that the Lord of the harvest may send forth labourers, competent labourers into his harvest.

The church is at the present time in the most urgent need of a more devoted and efficient ministry of the gos-

pel, and much progress will not be made without a supply of this deficiency. So long as the teachers of God's people continue to cherish the narrow views and feelings of sect, how can it be expected that their hearers will expand their minds to embrace the noble scheme of converting the world? So long as the minister does not take a lively interest in the benevolent enterprises of the day, and exert himself to awaken the same interest among his people, how can it be expected that Christians as a body will give their contributions or their prayers to the cause of evangelizing the nations in darkness? So long as our young men in the ministry "seek *first*" a place of comfort and ease in which to serve their Master, how can we expect the laity to become self-denying Christians, living above the world, and devoting all they have to the promotion of Christ's kingdom? Much as we want men, yea, great numbers of men to preach the gospel of Christ, we verily believe that the church will be profited if our youth, before they enter upon the ministry, would seriously and deliberately count the cost of assuming the work of the Lord, while destitute of the zeal and self-denial of Paul, of Brainerd, of Martyn, and of Gutzlaff. For though all may not be wanted as missionaries, all need to have the spirit of missions to answer the just expectations of Christ and his church. The field of labour is the world, and no minister of the gospel is excusable for not having at all times a map of the world in his eye, and for not being in the constant habit of exhibiting it to the people of his charge. There ought not to be a Christian ignorant of the monthly concert of prayer, nor of the progress of foreign and domestic missions, nor of the destitute condition of the world in regard to Bibles and tracts, nor of what is doing to afford the

requisite supply. All ought to be well informed of the need of raising up more labourers for the harvest, and what is done toward that object by means of education societies and Sabbath schools. Every Christian ought, in short, to be acquainted with the moral wants of the world, and of the whole system of means for supplying those wants. And how shall all this be done where the bosom of the minister does not burn to advance the interests of Christ's kingdom, not merely within the narrow bounds of his own parish, but throughout the whole earth?

To be an approved minister of Christ at the present time, a man must be constantly awake and active, keeping his eye without winking upon the great, noble, and absorbing object of converting the whole world to the faith and obedience of Christ. Such a man in every congregation would unite the hearts and efforts of Christians in the common cause of religion. We should not then witness a small number, but a great assembly, at every monthly concert for prayer for the success of the gospel. Instead of cents we should see dollars poured into the treasury of the Lord. Instead of a few Christians who pray and give for the conversion of the nations, we should see the whole body united as much, certainly, as they are now united in praying and contributing for the support of the gospel at home. We should not then see whole congregations where it is scarcely known what the monthly concert on the first or second Monday in every month means, and where the concert of prayer for colleges has never been observed, or where the cause of seamen is never mentioned; in a word, where the affections, exertions, and contributions of the people are, with the exception of perhaps a few individuals, exclusively

directed to the petty concerns of their own parish, or at most to the relations of their own sect. How can we expect a blessing on the church, how can we hope that the great work of evangelizing the world, can ever be accomplished under such circumstances? God requires, and he will have, the united prayers and efforts of his people for this object, before he will bring it to pass. However signally he may heretofore have answered the prayers of a few where those of multitudes ought to have ascended to him, we cannot reasonably expect the cause of universal religion at this day to flourish without the united prayers of God's people. There is too much light abroad on this subject to admit the belief that God will wink at the gross neglect of his ministers in giving the needful information, arousing the feelings and drawing forth the prayers of their parishioners for the universal prevalence of religion, as though it were a time of ignorance. No, the presses of the country are teeming with books, pamphlets, newspapers, and tracts, which are pouring upon us a flood of light, which cannot but be seen by all who will open their eyes to behold it. At all events the faithful watchman upon the walls of Zion cannot plead ignorance, whatever may be pleaded by the people of his charge. It is only for the minister of Christ to exhibit to the people the light which is, so to speak, forced upon his vision, to enable them to see and feel it to be their duty and privilege to have their prayers and their alms come up for a memorial before God, that he may fill the earth with his salvation and his glory.

We live in a day of excitability. The wonderful events which have transpired, and are still transpiring before us in rapid succession, have awakened and are keeping alive the disposition to attend to those subjects which

may be submitted to the minds of the people. There seems to be life infused into every thing, except those subjects which are of the greatest magnitude, and of the most immediate necessity. There is life even in these matters, but it is only among a few; it is not diffused through the body of Christians. The externals of religion are receiving an attention unwonted in former days. The erection of places of worship, attendance upon the public ordinances of Christianity, and outward respect for religion, seem in some measure to keep pace with the increased interest which is perceptible among men in regard to other subjects of attention; but as to the true nature of a church, and the design of God in establishing it, and the appropriate self-denying duties of Christianity, the professed worshippers of God seem still to be buried in the deep slumber which the dominion of sect has cast upon them. How shall the people awake while the watchmen are asleep, and forbear to sound the trumpet, showing the people what God requires of them in this day and generation?

Oh, how much reason, then, have we to cherish the spirit of prayer, and especially that God would bless his church with a more devoted and efficient ministry of the gospel, to the end that a holy light and influence may be diffused through the church, and hasten the restoration of primitive love, unity, and holiness!

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE OPERATION AND RESULT OF THE MEANS TO BE EMPLOYED.

Some endeavour has already been made to show the tendency of the means recommended in the two preceding chapters, to bring about the avowed object of this work. This topic, however, seems to deserve a more particular consideration, and a more connected view; and we shall endeavour to do it as succinctly as a distinct expression of our views will permit.

It may be apprehended by some that the proposal made to heal the dissensions in the church, will produce more distraction and mischief than will be prevented by it. We admit that a naked proposal to abolish sects, without pointing out the manner and means of effecting it, might occasion great detriment instead of profit, and confusion instead of order. Some men of corrupt minds, loving distinction or lucre more than the religion of the Bible, on perceiving a growing inclination among Christians to forget their past differences, may regard it as a

favourable occasion to form a new party in the church, to be composed of all sects, and thus add another to the many denominations already existing. Or a like unfortunate step might be taken by some of the real friends of religion, possessing more of zeal than of prudence. Such men, convinced of the evils of division, and not apprized of the necessity of labour and pains to prepare the minds of men for so great a revolution in their opinions, habits, and practices, might hastily propose the formation of churches to embrace all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity.

Such measures as these we sincerely deprecate. No good, but much detriment, would result from them. Any movement towards amalgamation, before a great change shall have been effected in the feelings of the different parties, would but produce an order of professed believers of the same description with those Corinthians who affirmed that they were of Christ, and whom the apostle reproves as schismatics, equally with those who professed to be the followers of Paul, of Apollos, and Cephas. The whole scheme of restoring the unity of the church, if not entirely defeated, would be greatly retarded. That such evils may result from the attempt we propose, to form a union of Christians, constitutes no objection to the plan itself. No reformation or enterprise of any kind is or can be free from the danger of being impeded, and even thwarted, by the precipitancy of zealots, who either do not understand, or do not regard the views of the projector; and if no scheme, however laudable, practicable, or important, can with propriety be presented to the public, that is not susceptible of abuse, or liable to miscarry, from the ignorance or perverseness

of men, then must we needs abandon every hope of ameliorating the condition of man.

That the proposal to restore Christian union is in itself unobjectionable and praiseworthy, nay, that it is a plain duty resting upon the friends of the church, has, we hope, been sufficiently shown. We trust also that the means for accomplishing the object which we have ventured to suggest, are in themselves proper, harmless, free from all objection, and that they possess an adaptation to accomplish the end proposed. Other means better adapted to the purpose may, in the providence of God, be developed after the reformation shall have been commenced. And even now, there may be individual Christians who have more discernment, or have bestowed more thought upon the subject than we have, to whose minds a better course of means may have been suggested. One object of the publication of this work, is to invite attention to the great subject of Christian union, to induce Christians to reflect upon it, and to bring out the result of their thoughts before the religious world, that others may have the benefit of the light which they possess.

We certainly do not claim to have presented to the public a new doctrine. Far from it. The principles we have laboured to establish in the preceding pages, have always had advocates, ever since the protestant church has fallen from the unity in which the reformation commenced, and in which it has been left by Christ, his apostles, and the primitive Christians. But the voice of truth has been drowned by the noise of controversy and fierce contention, and the Christian world has now for so long a time been under the influence of sect, that what is truly a plain doctrine of the Bible, and has

always been believed in by some, sounds upon the ear of the generality of Christians as though it were entirely new. It seemed therefore proper that the proposal to reunite the broken ranks of Christians should be accompanied with as ample a discussion of the question of duty, as they would probably be inclined to read, and as though the principles advanced were entirely new.

If this work should succeed in receiving a good measure of attention from the Christian public, the principal object of the author will be accomplished. Men of superior minds will examine for themselves, and we have no fear, but that the result of an impartial examination will lead them to the same conviction to which we have come ourselves. And this conviction will not fail to be communicated to others through the press, from the pulpit, and otherwise. In this manner, a flood of light will in few years break in upon the vision of the Christian public, and the great, important truth of the unity of the church, and the consequent duty of union among all its members, which has so long remained buried in the darkness of sect, will find its way into the minds of God's children. And the force which the truth will exert upon them will be great; especially as it is a truth plainly revealed, of vital importance to the interests of religion, and which condemns their past opinions, habits, and practice, and brings the whole Christian community now living, with a long line of revered fathers and predecessors, under the sentence of having departed from the truth and way of the Lord. This must produce deep sorrow that they, their friends, and ancestors have inflicted so much injury upon the church and cause of God, and must be followed with a humble confession of the sin, and induce them to raise earnest supplications

for pardon, and for direction and grace, that henceforth they may be guided in the way of the peculiar duty God now requires of them, to retrace past errors.

This frame of mind cannot fail to prepare those who possess it, for the communication of the Lord's favour to them. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. Prov. xxviii. 13. The Lord will have compassion on his penitent children; he will hear their cry for pardon, and according to the abundance of his mercy, he will forgive. He will hearken to their supplications to be guided thenceforth in the path of obedience to his requirements, and he will graciously show them the way. He will teach them, according to his own wisdom and goodness, what further means are to be employed to induce the whole community of Christians to cast away their party prejudices, and reform their sectarian habits, and to bring them cordially into the holy bond of Christian union.

Another of the means which we have advised to aid the progress of the reformation, is that all the friends of the church should abstain from unprofitable controversy, on the points of dispute between them. Who will be disposed to deny that controversy not only alienates the affections, and promotes disunion, but prevents the genuine operation of grace to draw together the disciples of the Lord and Saviour. Let this agent of discord be hushed into silence, and you remove a great obstacle to the flow of mutual love in Christian bosoms, to the desire of peace, the holding of communion in praise, thanksgiving, and prayer, and the union of counsel and effort. It cannot be long after the cessation of the needless and unavailing disputes which now are prevalent,

that the possessors of the same essential faith will perceive how trifling in their character are those differences which now serve the purpose of the great adversary to cherish jealousy, envy, anger, and schism among them, and how numerous and precious are the doctrines and truths respecting which they are of the same mind, and speak the same thing.

The next means which we have specified in the two preceding chapters, as conducive to the restoration of Christian union, is that the church receive her members and license ministers of the gospel, upon the principles recognised and taught in the Bible; namely, that members be received when they give evidence that they are actual members of the spiritual body of Christ; and that ministers be licensed when they exhibit evidence of their qualifications to win souls to Christ, to edify believers, and honour the ministry by a holy walk. The adoption of these principles will be greatly facilitated, after the spirit of controversy shall have died away. That the reception of church members, and licensure of ministers upon these catholic grounds, will have a strong tendency to allay the spirit of party, and promote the union of Christian hearts, must be evident to even a superficial thinker. A true disciple of Christ, wherever his lot may be cast, will desire to associate with those of like mind, to put himself under the watchful care of some church, as well as to partake of its ordinances and privileges. If he cannot be freely received where he sees the prospect of deriving the most of spiritual benefit, it requires much of grace to preserve towards the members of that church the same measure of Christian affection, which he would in case he had been received by them. And on the other hand, it is extremely diffi-

cult for the members of any church, to banish from their minds a sense of superiority over such as are deemed unqualified to be received among their number. By adopting a more liberal course, these unpleasant feelings and causes of alienation will be avoided, and a more friendly spirit will be promoted. The shibboleths of party must soon melt away, after they shall cease to be applied in practice, in the admission of church members, and the licensing of ministers of the gospel. Room will at once be left for an increasing prevalence of the sentiment so often repeated in the Bible, that all believers in Christ form but one body, and stand upon a footing of equality, and that the ban of exclusion must be applied only to the heretic, the hypocrite, and the corrupt.

And thus will be removed one of the barriers to the observance of an important duty, which we have also placed among the means of restoring Christian union, namely, to cherish the holy feeling of love to believers of every denomination. That the performance of this duty will hasten the abolition of sectarian feelings and distinctions, is almost too evident to admit of any illustration. That it is a practicable duty will not be denied, when we reflect that our affections are much under the control of our faculties. The consciousness that we are bound to love another, will oftentimes be the means of producing that love, even against the power of strong previous antipathies. A sense of the duty will lead us, not only to look more narrowly into the substantial reasons of the requirement, and the principles on which it is founded, but will move us to palliate and make every allowance for the imperfections and faults of the individual, and to seek out and dwell upon their good and amiable qualities. Many, very many considerations

will crowd upon the mind of a Christian, why he should love his brother in Christ, whenever he shall have fully yielded to the conviction that it is his duty to love him, and understand the measure in which that love should be exercised, and thus will be produced in the Christian bosom the very affection he desires to cultivate and cherish.

The active and liberal support of the benevolent societies of the day, we have also enumerated among the means of terminating the schisms in the church of Christ. And we know of no means which are more happily adapted to unite the hearts and the exertions of God's people. Every volume of the Holy Scriptures issued from the American Bible Society, — every tract distributed from the American Tract Society, — every book which comes from the press of the American Sunday School Union, — every missionary sent forth by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, or by the Home Missionary Society, — every preacher or spiritual labourer employed by the Seamen's Friend Society, — is looked upon as a servant of Jesus Christ, to promote his kingdom throughout the world, and not as an instrument to advance the interests of a petty sect. Every instance of success achieved by the agency thus employed, is considered as won for the cause of universal religion, instead of a victory for a small section of the church. The thousands of readers of the publications detailing the acts and proceedings of these benevolent institutions, have a common feeling of interest in the information thus communicated. They rejoice together, when they witness the liberality of Christians in supporting these charities, when they read of doors of usefulness opened to their efforts, of the

smiles of God upon their contributions and exertions, in calling sinners to repentance in lands of darkness and desolation. They sympathize together, when they hear of sickness and death among the agents of their benevolence, or of any untoward event to impede the holy cause they are striving to advance. They meet together at the monthly concert, to render thanks to God for success afforded, to humble themselves before him under any rebuke or adverse providence, and to supplicate his aid and direction in the future conduct of their enterprises. And in the larger multitudes which annually convene at our religious anniversaries, in the principal cities, while listening to the reports of what has been done, and contemplated to be done, they become elated with the same hopes, and moved with the same desires, they offer the same prayers, and render the same thanksgivings. It is on such occasions that liberal Christians experience fulness of joy, and their breasts heave with anxious desire that every believer may be blessed with a still fuller measure. It is then that they know how to pity the scantiness of that enjoyment which is felt by him who cannot expand his heart beyond the bounds of his own denomination. They long for a return of those seasons which have such a happy influence in binding together the hearts of God's children, in the sweet ties of brotherly love. How easy and natural is it for such as only for a few years continue to act together, in the promotion of these holy charities, to desire and strive to effect an entire union of affection, counsel, action, and name, so that they may be one, as Christ and the Father are one. They soon begin to wonder why there should be any separation between them, why they have so long been strangers to each other, and what there is to pre-

vent a complete union. The chains of sect, once so strong, appear to them lilliputian ties which cannot hold them in distinct communities, and which, like the cords wherewith the Philistines bound Samson, when the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, become as flax that is burnt with fire.

The primitive Christians read the books of the Old and New Testament, expecting, with the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to find therein sufficient direction to instruct them in the doctrines and practice of Christianity. It will be readily perceived how directly and powerfully it would promote the union of believers, should this manner of reading the Scriptures become the general habit among them. This is one of the means we have specified in the preceding chapter, and is, we believe, among the most important. If it were once adopted, it would soon appear plain that all the attempts which have been made to reduce the language of the Bible to greater precision and certainty have grossly failed to advance the cause of truth, and have rather served to darken counsel by words without knowledge; and that however heretics may conceal their corrupt opinions by adhering to the words of the Bible, that yet, after all, the best way of stating the revealed mind of God is to use the expressions which have been dictated by the Holy Ghost, the source and fountain of light and wisdom. It would moreover be seen that many disputes have agitated and rent the church, which originated not from any obscurity or uncertainty in the words employed in the Scriptures, but from the ingenuity and presumption of men, who, whether unwittingly or otherwise, sought to be wise above what is written, and to pry into things which God has seen best not to reveal or explain. All, reading and

studying the same standard of faith and practice in the simplicity which God himself has given it, without attempting to bend its meaning to the respective creeds, confessions, and systems of the church, they will of necessity become more of the same mind and of the same judgement. Then too it will become apparent how much of the Bible is taken up in inculcating peace, love, and unity, and how much there is in it of dissuasion from jealousies, disputes, contentions, and divisions among brethren of the same family. By the continued perusal of the Scriptures, it will also be learned of how little value are all abstract opinions, however correct, except as they lead to a more acceptable worship and service of God, and a more benevolent behaviour towards man.

The union of Christians will also be materially aided when they shall abound in prayer to God appropriate to the present wants of the church, and especially for a more devoted and efficient ministry of the gospel. God is doubtless pleased with the petitions of his people, when they bring before him their precise wants. He wishes them to be acquainted with all their wants, to feel their need of help, and then ask him to give it. When, therefore, under a deep sense of the sin and evils of schism, and the duty and blessedness of living in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, they shall ask his guidance and assistance, the most happy results may be expected from the promises and faithfulness of their heavenly Father. And since a return to the primitive unity of the church, and indeed its prosperity in all its relations, depends so much on a devoted and efficient ministry, when the disciples shall feel the want of such a ministry, they will not only pray, but labour and expect to obtain it. We doubtless receive in proportion to the extent of our

desires, petitions, and efforts. "Open thy mouth and I will fill it." Did they but perceive with anxiety the necessity of a more catholic ministry, with minds enlarged to comprehend the wants of the world, and forgetting the narrow circle of their sectarian relations, they would ask and strive for, and be supplied with such a ministry; for God will not give them a stone when they ask for bread, nor when they ask for a fish will he give them a scorpion.

The tendency of most, if not all the means we have specified, it must be admitted, is to increase the amount and raise the standard of piety in the church: and we are confident that whatever shall produce this happy result will also promote the union of Christians. We are apprized that in the strenuous exertions now made by synods, presbyteries, and other ecclesiastical bodies of several denominations, to strengthen the attachment of their people to their own peculiar tenets, rites, and forms of government, they enumerate among the means to accomplish this end, the attainment of a more elevated standard of Christian character. It is matter of rejoicing that public bodies of such diverse views and sentiments agree in recommending a measure of such excellence, although it would have been more satisfactory to have learned from them what they precisely mean by it. If they understand by a more elevated standard of piety the same thing that we do, namely, a greater conformity of heart and life to the requirements of God's word, then we venture to affirm that when this point shall have been attained, instead of confirming their people in the love of sectarian peculiarities, their minds will have become expanded to see the folly and sin of such attachment, and to embrace the more noble and scriptural principle of

Christian unity. The tendeney of deep piety to promote this union is happily illustrated by the Rev. Andrew Reed of London, lately on a mission of love to this eountry, designed to strengthen the bond of union between British and American Christians. We allude to a missionary sermon preached by him in his own eountry some two or three years ago, entitled, "Eminent Piety essential to Eminent Usefulness." We have read the sermon with mueh pleasure, and regret that we have not a copy at hand to selcct some quotations. We have, however, reeently met with a pretty full expression of the views of Robert Hall on the same point, and cannot deny ourselves the gratification of giving the following extract, for the length of which the reader will find himself amply compensated, when he shall have witnessed its pertinency, cleganec, and force: "That union among Christians which it is so desirable to recover, must, we are persuaded, be the result of something more heavenly and divine, than legal restraints, or angry controversies. Unless an angel were to deseend for that purpose, the spirit of division is a disease which will never be healed by troubling the waters. We must expeet the eure from the increasing prevalence of religion, and from a copious communication of the Spirit to produce that event. A more extensive diffusion of piety among all sects and parties, will be the best and only preparation for a cordial union. Christians will then be disposed to appreciate their differenecs more equitably, to turn their chief attention to points on which they agree, and in consequenee of loving each other more, to make every concession consistent with a good conscience. Instead of wishing to vanquish others, every one will be desirous of being vanquished by the truth. An awful fear of God,

and an exclusive desire of discovering his mind, will hold a torch before them in their inquiries, which will strangely illuminate the path in which they tread. In the room of being repelled by mutual antipathy, they will be insensibly drawn nearer to each other by the ties of mutual attachment. A larger measure of the spirit of Christ would prevent them from converting every incidental variation into an impassable boundary; or from condemning the most innocent and laudable usages for fear of symbolizing with another class of Christians. The general prevalence of piety in different communities would inspire that mutual respect, that heartfelt homage for the virtues conspicuous in the character of these respective members, which would urge us to ask with astonishment and regret, Why cannot we be one? What is it that obstructs our union? Instead of maintaining the barrier which separates us from each other, and employing ourselves in fortifying the frontiers of hostile communities, we should be anxiously devising the means of narrowing the grounds of dispute, by drawing the attention of all parties to those fundamental and catholic principles in which they concur.

"To this we may add that a more perfect subjection to the authority of the great Head of the church, would restrain men from inventing new terms of communion, from lording it over conscience, or from exacting a scrupulous compliance with things which the word of God has left indifferent. That sense of imperfection we ought ever to cherish, would incline us to be looking up for superior light, and make us think it not improbable that, in the long night which has befallen us, we have all more or less mistaken our way, and have much to learn and much to correct. The very idea of identifying a

particular party with the church would be exploded; the foolish clamour about schism hushed, and no one, however mean and inconsiderable, be expected to surrender his conscience to the claims of ecclesiastical dominion. The New Testament is surely not so obscure a book, that were its contents to fall into the hands of a hundred serious, impartial men, it would produce such opposite conclusions as must necessarily ensue, in their forming two or more separate communions. It is remarkable, indeed, that the chief points about which real Christians are divided, are points on which that volume is silent—mere human fabrications, which the presumption of men has attached to the Christian system. A larger communication of the Spirit of truth, would insensibly lead Christians into a similar train of thinking; and being more under the guidance of that infallible teacher, they would gradually tend to the same point, and settle in the same conclusions. Without such an influence as this, the coalescing into one communion would probably be productive of much mischief; it certainly would do no sort of good, since it would be the mere result of intolerance and pride acting upon indolence and fear.

"During the present disjointed state of things, then, nothing remains but for every one, to whom the care of any part of the church of Christ is intrusted, to exert himself to the utmost in the promotion of vital religion, in cementing the friendship of the good, and repressing, with a firm and steady hand, the heats and eruptions of party spirit. He will find sufficient employment for his time and his talents in inculcating the great truths of the gospel, and endeavouring to form Christ in his hearers, without blowing the flames of contention, or widening the breach which is already the disgrace and the calami-

ty of the Christian name. Were our efforts uniformly to take this direction, there would be an identity in the impression made by religious instruction; the distortion of party features would gradually disappear, and Christians would every where approach towards that ideal beauty spoken of by painters, which is combined of the finest lines and traits conspicuous in individual forms. Since they have all drunk into the same spirit, it is manifest nothing is wanting but a larger portion of that spirit to lay the foundation of a solid, cordial union. It is to the immoderate attachment to secular interest, the love of power, and the want of reverence for truth, not to the obscurities of revelation, we must impute the unhappy contentions among Christians, maladies which nothing can correct but deep and genuine piety."

As has been already intimated, we have not enumerated all the means which we believe adapted to accomplish the reunion of the friends of Christ. We have specified what may rather be called the incipient measures to prepare the minds of Christians to adopt those of a more decisive and effective character, bearing more directly upon the final result. Should the Lord smile upon those which we have pointed out, other means will soon come in aid of them to hasten the work.

Among these will be the discontinuance of that sectarian training which is now given to children by parents, and even some Sabbath schools, and by ministers to their congregations. If we should weigh the prospect of the final accomplishment of the scheme of reunion, we would name this as the most important of them all, and as holding the same place in this, as the principle of total abstinence does in the temperance reformation. We should have placed it in the list of means in the preceding chap-

ters, had we not been persuaded that with the greater portion of the religious community it will not be adopted in the inceptive stage of the work. But to those who are prepared to hear it, we hesitate not to recommend it as a step to be taken at the very commencement, being convinced that wherever it is adopted the progress of the enterprise must be very rapid. As long as parents continue to inculcate upon their children, Sabbath school teachers upon their pupils, and ministers upon their people, the superior excellence and the scriptural authority of the tenets and forms of the denomination to which they belong, how can they ever become weaned from their attachment to sectarian peculiarities and distinctions, and how can they ever desire to draw closer the bond of union among God's children? As well might you expect to see sobriety prevail in a family where the cup of intoxication is daily ministered to its inmates. Whenever this sectarian training, by means of the catechisms and formularies of the churches, or through the sermons of the preacher, shall be abandoned, the very aliment of sectarianism will be withdrawn. The Bible then will be read without prejudice on the conflicting points that separate different denominations, and the truth of God will more probably be ascertained. But so long as that sectarian training is continued, we see not how, without a moral miracle, union ever can take place.

And why cannot this be done? Why need a Presbyterian, whether minister, parent, or Sabbath school teacher, say any thing about the doctrine of election or perseverance to his people, or children, or scholars? Why need a Methodist say any thing about falling from grace? Is either doctrine, if true, necessary to the salvation of the soul? And is not the "prima facie" evidence of the

truth of the one as great as that of the other, when the piety and talents of the respective denominations are weighed? Is it not worth the while of both, to give opportunity to the generation that shall rise up under their influence, to form their sentiments impartially upon those points which divide to so great an extent the Christian world? Has not one denomination as much reason to think itself right as another?

Other means of an effective character will not fail to succeed. The periodical press, instead of advancing the interests of sect, will advocate the necessity of abolishing them. Books of a more liberal and catholic stamp will take the place of such as are of a more exclusive character. More pains will be taken to increase the amount of general and useful knowledge, and the ignorance, which is so well adapted to cherish the narrow views and feelings of sect, be dispelled. The entire aspect of things will in a short time be changed. The whole current of feeling will run into a different channel. Christians of all names will see how nearly they are agreed in all the essentials of religion, and how unimportant are the differences which have so long kept them at variance. Intolerance will then be succeeded by the grace of forbearance, and the noise of contention hushed into silence by the spirit of conciliation. The Scriptures read in this frame of mind will vindicate their own plainness and certainty, after having been so long obscured through the folly, delusion, and perverseness of men.

The cautious reader, we are aware, may fail to perceive the sufficiency of all the means we have hitherto specified, to work so great a revolution as that which is requisite to place the church on the basis of its primitive unity. He may admit that an important amelioration

would take place in the state of Christian feeling, if only those means were employed which we have advised, or even if a part of them were adopted; but difficulties may still remain, which in his view are not only serious, but insurmountable. He may ask, How is the union to be ultimately effected? Which of the denominations will be willing to make the first overture? Will the union, when formed, be based on the broad ground of the Scriptures, or will a short creed be adopted, embracing the cardinal doctrines of the Christian religion upon which the different sects are now agreed? And may there not be difficulty in settling what these cardinal doctrines shall be, and whether they shall embrace three, four, or more points? And after all these matters are settled, it may be asked, which of the several forms of government now in use will be adopted for the united church? And how will the present differences of sentiment in regard to rites and forms be reconciled?

We remark, in answer to these questions, that the difficulties above suggested, and all others that may be imagined, lie exclusively in the frame of mind of the parties at variance. While distance, jealousy, controversy, and alienation of heart, continue to subsist between the different sects, the obstacles to their reunion will remain insuperable; but whenever these evil affections shall be removed, or materially modified, then the difficulty of a total reconciliation is reduced almost entirely to a matter of opinion on the question of duty or interest. When nations, for instance, are at war, a pacification is hopeless while the spirit of hostility prevails. As soon as this subsides the disposition to peace will return, and the point of honour which shall make the first overture is readily forgotten, preliminary difficulties are easily removed, the

questions of interest, supposed or real, are discussed in the spirit of conciliation; and when these are settled the terms of the treaty are easily adjusted. How often and how suddenly, sometimes, have nations been induced in this manner to terminate the most deadly hostilities! So a husband and wife, living in a state of separation, (and they may, not inaptly, be compared to the divided church,) will resist all attempts to bring them to live together in peace, so long as they indulge in feelings of opposition or alienation. But means may be employed to produce between them a better feeling, and as soon as this is effected, they will not only perceive that it is their duty to be agreed and live together as becometh man and wife, but they will be anxious to remove every impediment that may be in the way, and then the result of a happy reconciliation may be confidently expected. In like manner means may be employed to change the current of feeling which at present subsists among the scattered disciples, whom their Lord has united in a bond as intimate as that between husband and wife; and some of the means we have enumerated will be conceded to have a tendency to effect the object. When once the state of heart is brought about which the Scriptures require, and teach to be attainable, no points of honour will remain to be settled, no scruples left as to who shall make the first overture; the terms and basis of the union cannot long remain obstacles in the way of those who have essentially the same faith, and are baptized into the same spirit. If it shall be deemed necessary or proper to state a few essential points of doctrine as the basis of union, what can hinder them from agreeing what they shall be, and to forbear one another on all minor differences?

The form of government for the church which has oc-

casioned so much of controversy, and which may now seem so formidable a difficulty in the way of Christian union, will appear comparatively a matter of small consequence, unless it shall be found so definitively settled in the word of God as to preclude honest differences of opinion between those who love the truth. At all events, when the minds of men shall have become more moulded into the spirit of the gospel, they will search the Scriptures to ascertain whether the form of church government is therein prescribed, and if it is, they will honestly admit the truth. If it shall be found that it is not, the question of expediency will be the only topic of discussion remaining, and will be settled, we apprehend, without serious difficulty. The same remark may be made in regard to the rituals of the church, which, as well as the mode of its government, cannot be said to belong to the essentials of religion, being only the means of securing those things which are of more value, namely, the blessings of religion themselves. Possibly a form of government may be adopted for the united church different from any that now exists in any of the denominations. The time surely has not now come to attempt to settle this and the matter of rituals. When the church shall be prepared to enter upon these questions, every difficulty may have already melted away. It is now impossible to conceive with what facility the breaches in the household of Christ will be healed, when it shall be acknowledged and felt as an *important and evident truth taught in the Scriptures, that they must be agreed*—that there may be no divisions between them. When once the spirit of love shall have re-entered the church, the tendency to union, which is already strong in many Christian bosoms at the present time, will become irresistible,

remove impediments, and mow down obstacles. Then will brethren employ themselves with more diligence, alacrity, earnestness, and perseverance, in demolishing the walls of partition, than they formerly were, or now are, in erecting and strengthening them. Then may the Almighty also be expected to bring the wonderful workings of his providence to aid the efforts of his children, until every difficulty shall be removed, and the reunion of his people accomplished.

Having in this work endeavoured to convince our Christian friends of a duty which, we are assured, most of them had not previously realized, it has been our design not only to prove the duty itself to be clearly incumbent upon them, but to show further that the performance of the duty will be followed with success. In order to this, we have placed before them the means of effecting this object, and have endeavoured to trace the operation of those means until the final result of the reunion of the church shall be accomplished. We admit it to be reasonable, in general, that an author who undertakes to convince the community of the duty of effecting a reformation, the benefit of which shall be common to all, should also give all the light he possesses as to the means and mode of its accomplishment, and thereby excite sufficient confidence in the practicability of the scheme, to induce others to embark in it. Yet we doubt whether on the present occasion the Christian public could with propriety require more at our hands, than to show that the union of believers on the original basis ordained of Christ, would be pleasing to God—and that he must be displeased with their neglecting to effect this union. Were it a matter plainly beyond their reach or power, they might conscientiously leave it either wholly undone, or

urge the performance of it upon others, who could not plead the same exemption. But here we propose a matter of common interest to every member of the church, for upon every one the duty of working the reform necessarily devolves, and not one can claim an excuse on the ground that others ought to perform it. The duty must either be acknowledged by Christians, or they must assume the impracticability of the scheme as the reason why they are excusable from action. And an assumption of this kind we apprehend they have no right to make. The duty itself, aside from the question of its practicability, is very clear. Can any Christian then be permitted to say, I may safely lie idle until some one shall prove that the execution of the plan is practicable? No; it is as much his duty as that of any other, to contrive the proper means to effect it, and to remove the difficulties and obstacles; and he cannot conscientiously fold his arms in inaction until he has exhausted his resources to discover those means, and satisfied himself that the object, however desirable, is unattainable. He cannot have the right to sit still and turn a deaf ear to the call of duty, until some one shall voluntarily come to give him the instruction he ought to seek for himself. We infer from these remarks, that our readers ought not to reject the proposal made in this work, even if we have failed to strip the question of its practicability of every difficulty. We even claim the right of calling on them, as fellow Christians, possessing the same interest as ourselves in the success of the reformation, to aid us with their advice and countenance in the removal of every impediment. *The* point of *duty*, we repeat, is exceedingly *clear*. The state of the church is wrong. She is divided, but ought to be united. She was one as origi-

nally constituted, — she will be one in heaven, — and Christians of every denomination believe that she will be one again on earth. Whenever that shall take place, the difficulties in the way of her reunion will have been previously removed, in the providence of God, we admit, but not by the exercise of his miraculous power. This is not expected by any. The work will have been done by human instrumentality. It must be done by Christians, for the enemies of religion will never do it. A great and arduous work is to be accomplished, which requires the aid of all who can be brought to take a part. What Christian, then, can claim to be exempt from assuming his share in it? None may wait till they hear a voice from heaven commanding them what they must do, nor until the road has been cleared of its obstructions, by such as are more industrious and obedient, or less fearful and unbelieving. We may not plead our own wrong state of mind, as an excuse for the neglect of our duties.

It is moreover a *present* duty. How can we allege that we may lie still until the more formidable obstacles are removed, when it is our duty to remove them ourselves without delay, and when we have no authority to command another to remove them for us? Nothing can be gained by postponing the commencement of the work; for the evil is meanwhile increasing, and the difficulties are multiplying. While the church continues in its present distracted state, the name of God is dishonoured, the body of Christ bleeds afresh at every pore, and sinners are plunging by millions into hell. What reason, then, can possibly be alleged against the commencement of the work now, which will not hold good to the end of time? "The fearful and the unbelieving,"

as well as the indolent, always cry the time is not yet, and if there were not some of more courage, stronger faith, and greater diligence, every attempt to reform what is amiss would fail, through the pretence that the time has not fully come; and if they were to be the judges, the time never would come. The time to set about the correction of an evil, is when you become sensible of its existence. The choice of time which is left to those upon whom the duty of performing the work devolves, has no application to the period when the work is to commence, but only to the order of the various means and steps in the process of its accomplishment.

Again, there is always more or less of distance and darkness between the commencement and accomplishment of every great enterprise. None has ever been entered upon with an unclouded prospect of success. The malignity of sin is apparent from the very difficulty of removing its effects; and God may often refuse to give immediate and easy success to the efforts of his children, to suppress the evils that afflict the church or the world, lest they should have inadequate views of the inveterate nature of disobedience to his laws and requirements. So that in all attempts to reform evils of any magnitude, it is necessary to exercise faith in God, and watch for the development which his providence may bring about. If we are unwilling to do this, and insist on his making our way plain before us, the whole length of the journey, ere we consent to enter upon it, we refuse to trust him further than the limited extent of our own vision will reach. The patriarch Abraham, when he was commanded to leave his kindred and the land of his fathers, to sojourn in a strange country, certainly did not foresee the manner of surmounting every diffi-

culty that lay in his way, or of sustaining every trial he might be called to endure. But he did not hesitate to obey the command; he believed God, and was prospered. Moses, on the other hand, displeased the Lord, by his persistence in stating difficulties and obstacles, when directed to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt into the promised land; and though he had a distant view of Canaan, he was not permitted to enter upon or enjoy its blessings, while it was reserved to Joshua, who exhibited a more simple reliance on the word and the promise of the Lord, to lead the people, and take possession himself of the land that flowed with milk and honey. Instances of the like nature might be multiplied from the Scriptures, but it is unnecessary.

It is answered that in these cases God gave support to the faithful by the exercise of his miraculous power, and that in our case it is not to be expected, as miracles have long since ceased. We reply that God is able now, and always was, to perform without miracle whatever it may please him to do; and whatever he has promised, he will assuredly perform. His guidance and direction may now be relied on by all who sincerely desire do their duty. Prov. iii. 6. "In all thy ways acknowledge God, and he shall direct thy paths." Is. xxviii. 26. "God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him." Is. xliii. 16. "I will make darkness light before thee, and crooked things straight." Ps. xxxvii. 5. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." Is. xxx. 21. "Thine ear shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it." These exceeding great and precious promises were confided in by Luther, or he never would have encountered the difficulties, obstacles,

and dangers of resisting the usurpations, and exposing the abominations of popery, and of bringing a church to serve God out of mystical Babylon. He believed God, and received help in the time of need. We have strong facts also of a very recent date, proving the faithfulness of God to verify his word of promise to his people, when they seek to glorify him by extending the kingdom of Christ, honouring his word, and suppressing vice and ungodliness. What was it but confidence in the help of God, that encouraged the British and Foreign, as well as the American Bible Society, to undertake the grand enterprise of supplying a large, and then a larger, and afterwards a still larger portion of the human family with the Bible? What animated the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and the various missionary societies in England and the continent, to assume the sublime duty of converting the world, but their belief that the work was pleasing to the Lord, and that he had made it the duty of his children to perform it, and would certainly afford his aid? Has he forsaken any of the benevolent societies of the day, who have sought to advance his cause in obedience to his requirements?

Even individuals reduced to the necessity of deliberating and acting alone, without any counsel or help other than that of their Almighty Friend, have, by casting themselves upon him, in the day of perplexity and trial, received all the direction and help which they needed, and have thus been enabled to accomplish what, but to the eye of faith, would seem impossible. The apostle tells "of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, of Samuel, and the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought

righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Confidence in God will draw forth his power to help now as much as it did in the days of those worthies. Why then should we doubt whether he will guide his people, when large numbers of them combine their prayers, their counsels, and their efforts to accomplish a work so dear to his heart as the healing of the divisions that have rent his church in pieces, the restoring of peace among her warring sections, and re-establishing the beauty and strength of her unity?

Let the friends of the Redeemer, then, only enter with their whole hearts upon the work which it is their plain duty to perform, and confidently trust in his almighty arm. He will crown their labours, in due time, with complete success, and the results will be glorious. The distance, alienation of affection, disputes, and contentions which now separate the disciples of Christ, and which are a reproach to the profession of religion, will give place to brotherly love, harmony, and peace. Hypocrites and unbelievers will not find so easy an entrance into the church, as they do now, in the sectarian strife to multiply the number of their followers; and the increased facilities which will then exist to maintain a purer discipline, will render their expulsion more safe and easy. The doctrines and the duties inculcated in the Bible will be better understood, and exert a more powerful and evident influence upon those who bear the name of Christ. The standard of piety will be greatly elevated. The opposers of religion, instead of being strengthened in their opposition and unbelief by the

bigotry, hypocrisy, contentious dispositions, and inconsistent walk of Christians, will be constrained to admire a more worthy exhibition by its possessors of the holy religion of the Scriptures, and multitudes of them will be converted to the faith of the gospel. Both the strength and beauty of unity, which the church had lost during the long period of her divisions, will be restored. The light of Christianity will shine as in the days of the apostles, and with increasing lustre. The plenitude of God's blessing will no longer be withheld from his church, when his children shall be again united in affection, in counsel, in action, and in name. The waste places in Zion will all be repaired. The power and wisdom of the whole united church will be combined to send the gospel to every creature, and the Holy Spirit, so long grieved and restrained in his influences, during the strife and contests of sects, will be poured out as rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth. God will raise up many labourers like Paul, and nations shall be born in a day, and soon will the world be subdued to the obedience of the gospel. The heavens shall drop down from above, and the skies shall pour down righteousness. The earth shall open, and bring forth salvation, and righteousness shall spring up together, for the Lord hath created it. Then will the united churches of Christ be a crown of glory in the hands of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of our God.

AN APPEAL

TO ALL CHRISTIANS OF EVERY DENOMINATION.

CHRISTIAN brethren, have we placed before you the picture of a gloomy fancy, or have we exhibited to you a sober view of the reality? Do you feel with us for the loss sustained by the individual Christian, the church, and the world, by means of the divisions in the family of the Saviour? Are you willing to mourn with us over the breaches of the church, her desolations, disgraced condition, her low estate, and imminent danger? Let us then with united and humbled hearts adopt the language of the Psalmist: "O God, thou hast cast us off; thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again. Thou hast made the earth to tremble, thou hast broken it; heal the breaches thereof, for it shaketh." Let us, with Asa and Josiah, with Hezekiah, Daniel, and Ezra, confess our iniquities, and the iniquities of our fathers, which have provoked the Lord to anger, and let us supplicate a return of his mercy and his loving kindness, that he may restore the glory of his church, and smile upon his people who are called after his own name.

Let us not only humble ourselves before our offended God, but exert ourselves to undo what we and our fathers have done; employing our faculties, our privileges, and opportunities, to heal the divisions in the church, and restore to her the peace, love, and unity, which she en-

joyed in the primitive ages of Christianity; yea, that the Lord may bestow upon her blessings still more abundant, even such as he has promised in his holy word to bestow upon her in the latter days.

We ought, assuredly, to yield to the motives presented in the Bible to us as friends of Christ, and professors of his religion. Do we desire to possess evidence of our adoption into the family of God? Let us then open our hearts to the exercise of brotherly love. Hereby do we know that we have passed from death unto life, if we love the brethren. 1 John iii. 14. Let us love, and manifest our love by treating as friends the brethren; not only those of our own name and party, but all who belong to Christ. Whosoever doeth the will of God is his brother, sister, and mother; and if they are so nearly and dearly related to him, we ought to feel that they are in like manner related to ourselves.

Or do you desire the consolations peculiar to the obedient disciples of Christ? "If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Phil. ii. 1, 2. Are you anxious to become established in the faith and practice of the gospel? Then "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Phil. i. 27. Do you long to exercise and exhibit the same mind that was also in our Lord and Saviour, knowing that he who has not the spirit of Christ is none of his? Then let your hearts' desire and prayer be like unto his, that his disciples may all be one, as he and the Father are one. Do you wish to manifest your love to the divine Redeemer? Then keep his commandments; and especially the new

commandment he gave his disciples, "that ye love one another as I have loved you." John xiii. 34.

Do you wish, Christian brethren, to convince a gainsaying and unbelieving world of the reality of the Christian religion by your exhibition of its character and influence? Then labour to promote love among the brethren; for "by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John xiii. 35. And let us all be one, according to the prayer of our Lord, that the world may know that the Father hath sent him.

Is it our desire that the gospel may exert its power upon the lives of its professors, and upon the whole world now lying in wickedness and ruin? Why do we not see this desire fulfilled even now? Does not our blessed Saviour himself instruct us that Christianity is diffusive in its nature like unto leaven? And have we not abundant means to propagate the gospel among those who have never heard its joyful sound, and to enforce its claims upon those who inhabit Christian climes? We have a thousand Bibles at our command where the primitive Christians had one; and we have millions of tracts, newspapers, and other productions of the press, while the apostles had none of these to minister the bread of life to the believer, and arouse the conscience of the unbeliever. All these we have in addition to the living preacher, and these we can send where he cannot be spared to go. We have, moreover, in the history of the church, in the history of the Jews, and of the world, and in the fulfilment of prophecy, subsequent to the days of the apostles, evidence as convincing perhaps as the miracles which were wrought, and the gift of tongues which was exercised in their day. The Holy Spirit has the same

power over the hearts of men to convince, persuade, and subdue, as he had in the days of Paul, and Peter, and John. Why then, O why, do not Christians possess and exhibit religion in the life and power which they did then, and why do not the heathen receive the gospel as they did in the primitive ages? This inquiry, we are happy to observe, has become one of intense interest. Wherefore is so little effected, while the means employed are so ample, and apparently adapted to the end sought to be accomplished? Some attribute it to the weakness of our faith, and others to a lack of the spirit of prayer, or of zeal, or of self-denial in the Christians of modern times. And, no doubt, in these things we are greatly deficient; yet it is difficult to ascertain how much more of these virtues and graces were exercised in the days of the apostles than at the present time. While we are disposed to admit that we come behind them in perhaps all the preceding particulars, *do we not fall short chiefly in this, that we are not, as they were,* OF ONE HEART AND ONE SOUL? Acts iv. 32. If the husband and wife, who live not as being heirs together of the grace of life, have thereby their prayers hindered, 1 Pet. iii. 7, who can tell whether the prayers and efforts of believers for the prosperity of Zion are not hindered by their unholy divisions? We verily fear that the Holy Spirit is grieved by our breaches of the peace and unity of the brotherhood, so that he is unwilling to impart to his church more than a scanty measure of his influence. Can the spirit of peace and love delight to dwell and exert the fulness of his influence in the midst of the controversies, strife, alienation of heart, envy, jealousy, pride and vainglory of sects? Who knows whether God is not waiting for his children to restore peace and brotherly love among themselves,

and to the church its primitive unity, before it will please him to put forth the fulness of his power upon the hearts of men in the evangelized and pagan world? The rebuke which a holy God is certainly ministering to his people, may be continued until the occasion of it shall be removed. How can we act in the right spirit, or pray in the right mind, while we remain in our present state of unlawful division? A husband and wife, whose affections are alienated from each other, cannot send up their united prayers to God; and their individual prayers will be hindered; much less can they be supposed to pray in the unity of the spirit when living in a state of actual separation induced by their disagreement. If they do not restrain prayer altogether, the duty cannot be performed in a proper frame of mind, for they cannot approach the mercy seat without a consciousness of living in a state which is offensive to God. So also the Christian, who is conscious of his duty, by God's requirement, to live in love and unity with all his brethren, "and that there may be no divisions among them," cannot, while living in a state of unlawful separation, come to the throne of grace with that confidence which is necessary to the performance of acceptable prayer. "If our heart condemn us not, *then* have we confidence towards God." 1 John iii. 21. But whose heart does not condemn him for his participation in the sin of division in the church of Christ? Permit us to assure you that "God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." 1 John iii. 20. Let us put away this sin, and then may we look for a more vigorous faith, a faith that will with a clear conscience lay hold on the perfections and promises of God; and then may we hope for the prevalence of fervent, earnest, humble and persevering prayer; and then will the *united*

supplications of God's people ascend to his throne; and then may we expect to behold the manifestation of more scriptural zeal and self-denial. And then shall the great hinderance to the efforts and prayers of the Lord's servants being removed, we may expect the influence of his Spirit to descend upon the church, as rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth.

In urging upon you, Christian brethren, to unite your hearts and your energies to restore the original unity of the church, permit us to appeal to your love for the glory of the Saviour's name. As the apostle deprecated the formation of a party among the Corinthians, even to the exaltation of his own name, preferring infinitely that all the glory should be ascribed to Christ, let not us permit any name to stand in competition with his, nor to detract in the least degree from the honour due to him. Yea, let us not suffer any name to be great, but that of Christ, and "*let every name be lost in his.*" Remember, we pray you, how Jesus connects his glory with the unity of his disciples; for in praying to the Father for them, he says, "And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one." John xvii. 22.

We appeal to your love for the church of Christ, which he hath purchased with his own blood, and to your anxious care for the prosperity of that church, that she may grow with the increase of God, that she may answer the great objects for which she has been constituted, and that she may be edified in every part. By your regard for these, we would urge you to pray and labour to restore unity and harmony to the members of that spiritual body of which Christ is the head, "from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compact-

ed by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Eph. iv. 16. By the most diligent, assiduous cultivation of the spirit of brotherly affection and unity, let us roll away the reproach which the church is suffering through the divisions of her children; and prove the falsity of the libels which have been published against the religion of the gospel, by showing that Christians *can live together* in harmony and love.

Suffer us to make our appeal to you, as lovers of the truth of God, which is too precious to be longer sacrificed on the altar of sect and party. Until the watchmen shall see eye to eye, the church will be troubled and deformed with errors, and as long as each sect adheres to its standard of doctrine, so long will those errors be perpetuated. Let us then unite our most earnest endeavours and our prayers to bring all Christians back to the only unerring standard of truth, the inspired writings of the Old and New Testaments, and to the rightful and only efficient and infallible teacher, the Holy Spirit. Let no writings of men be suffered to receive the honour which is due only to the word of God, and no teacher to bear any comparison with the Spirit of truth. Then "shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of darkness." "They also that erred in spirit, shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine." Let the blinded partisan who believes his church to be the only depository of the truth, and the members of his church the exclusive friends of the truth, be made to see that the cause of truth will be best advanced during the universal prevalence of the gospel, when all party distinc-

tions will be abolished. And let us not forget to cherish those truths which are connected with the peace of the church, "Love the truth and peace." Zech. viii. 19. "Let us follow after the things which make for peace." In declaring his purpose to restore his favour to the people of Jerusalem, God promises, Jer. xxxiii. 6, that he "will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth."

May we not indeed confidently appeal to you, as lovers of the peace of Jerusalem? Must the sword devour for ever? When shall it have an end? How dear is the peace of the church to the heart of the Saviour! In his last discourse with his disciples, preceding his death, when his bowels were moved with tender emotion, he tells them, John xiv. 27, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you." And after he had risen from the dead, the disciples being assembled at evening, and the doors of the house being shut, he came and stood in the midst of them, and said, "Peace be unto you. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you." "And after eight days, his disciples were within, and Thomas was with them, then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you." John xx. 19, 20, 21, 26. When shall the desires of the Saviour be accomplished in a conformity of the feelings and intercourse of his disciples, to his own benevolent heart? Even the children of the world shall, in the days to come, be hushed into peace, for "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid." Micah. iv. 3, 4. It cannot be that the followers of the Prince of Peace shall alone hearken to the voice of the grand seducer inciting to contention and division, when the nations of the earth shall hearken to the voice of reason and of God, so that the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and the child shall play on the hole of the asp. There is already formed and in operation a "*Peace Society*," whose efforts, we hope, God will bless, by moving the nations of the earth for ever to sheath the sword of war. Already do we count upon the advantages which will result to the church of Christ, by the removal of the obstacles which war presents to the progress of Christianity. But how do we know, Christian brethren, whether the peace of civil communities and of nations is not suspended on the restoration of peace in the church of Christ? Perhaps the Lord may turn a deaf ear to the supplications of his people, to moderate the heat of political parties in this country, until they shall have banished the spirit of party from the church. Perhaps God will not incline the nations of the world to put up the devouring sword, while his children are continuing strife and divisions between one another. We have at least no right to assume that he will invert the order of things which he has himself established, by making the world the salt of the church, instead of leaving the church to be the salt of the earth; or in other words, that he will give peace and unity to civil communities and to the nations of the earth, while the church remains the only theatre of war and divison. The Saviour tells his disciples, Mark ix. 50, "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another." Let us not, dear

brethren, undervalue the blessings of peace in the church, which is so very dear to our Saviour. His gospel is called the "gospel of *peace*." At his birth, the angels announced to the shepherds "peace on earth." The blessing of peace is mentioned in the Bible perhaps more frequently than any other. Indeed the word is often used to embrace within its meaning every other blessing, as though none were of any value in comparison with it; and as though God designed to teach us that there can be no compensation for the loss of peace; and that whatever may be sacrificed for the sake of peace, the supposed loss will oftentimes prove to be gain.

We address ourselves to the advocates and apologists of sect, and beseech them to examine well the ground on which they stand, and bring all their opinions to the test of the only standard of religious truth, the Holy Scriptures. We entreat them to remember how difficult it has always been to keep the church from departing from the writings of inspiration, and how prone men have always been to receive in their stead the commandments, the traditions, and the fallacious reasonings of men. We pray you to reflect on the many and direful evils, the unlawful and unconstitutional character of divisions in the church, and on the beauty, the strength, and excellence of unity. Such evils can you entail,—such blessings will you sacrifice on the altar of party strife? Consider, we implore you, the tremendous guilt connected with the maintenance of disunion in the household of Christ, the consequent disgrace of the church, and the incalculable loss of precious souls.

We address ourselves also to all who are engaged in religious controversy, although they may not be the advocates or apologists of sect, and we beg of them to

weigh well the tendency of their labours, especially at this crisis in the affairs of the church. Think, Christian brethren, whether our divine Master has not a more profitable service for you to perform, than to keep up contentions which tend to widen and multiply, or at least continue the breaches already existing in the church. The friends of Christ have now no time to spare for these purposes, when the providence of God calls for thousands of labourers to be otherwise employed. There is little danger that Christians will forget, or fail to appreciate, the truths of God's word, while they shall be like their Saviour, diligently employed in doing good, and obeying his command to evangelize the world. Now, if ever, we should be following after the things which make for peace, and let the din of controversy cease to distract the Christian community, while the foes of the church are thickening upon her. Where is the profit or propriety of discussing every subtle difficulty in the speculative theology of the church, while the church itself, as a house divided against itself, is in imminent danger of being brought to desolation.

We would appeal to all the friends of the reunion of the church, and exhort them to "be strong and of good courage; be not afraid nor be ye dismayed, for the Lord our God (as we verily believe) is with you." He has established the church originally upon the basis of unity, and she shall again be one, and your prayers and exertions for healing its divisions will be pleasing to him, and in due time you will reap, if you faint not; for he will command his blessing upon you, and prosper your efforts. He can melt away every obstacle that now presents itself against the holy cause which you have espoused; and sooner than you now dare to hope. Mul-

titudes who are at present blinded by the influence of sect, will come up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty. And even if you should fail, brethren, what can be the loss? Consider the means we propose to be pursued for restoring the unity of the church, and say whether these will leave the church in a worse condition than she now is? Who can doubt that she will be greatly benefited, when by them the religion of Christ will be raised to a higher standard, as well as be more widely diffused through the world? You and your children will participate in the general blessing. At all events, the reward of the peacemaker will be yours; for Christ himself has declared, "blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

We appeal to the ministers of the gospel of Christ, for to you belongs the principal agency in this work of the Lord. You are the watchmen on the walls of Zion, appointed to make strict observation of the position of the enemy, and of every movement he makes in his assaults upon your Master's kingdom; and to you it belongs as officers under the Captain of salvation, so to marshal and lead on his forces as to ensure the conquest he designs to make of the world, now under the usurped dominion of Satan. To you it pertains to collect the scattered bands of Christ, to persuade them to dismiss the spirit of discord, and to infuse into them the spirit of love and unity. Of all men, you are to exert the mightiest influence. By all means, let there be no divisions among *you*.

We make our appeal to the laymen of our churches, and especially those of the legal profession. You are beginning to assume a labour and exert an influence in

matters of religion, which a few years ago was almost wholly confided to and borne by the clergy. We count much, and place great reliance on your aid in this holy enterprise. You are certainly free from many of the entanglements of sect, in which the ministers of the gospel are involved. You are not bigots, and it is with you to sustain and encourage such of the clergy as would fain break the iron chain which holds them. As you are capable of understanding the subjects discussed in this work, we earnestly solicit your attention, and the exercise of your deliberate judgement upon them; and if you come to the same conclusions with ourselves, as to the evils, the unlawful and unconstitutional character of sectarian divisions, and the duty of Christians to restore the original unity of the church, we may assure ourselves of your cordial co-operation.

We would address ourselves also to the conductors of religious newspapers and other periodicals. You are doubtless conscious of your power in the direction of public sentiment; and we are aware that if you frown upon our enterprise, the difficulty of accomplishing it will be greatly increased. Should you smile upon it, we would count on you as our most powerful auxiliaries. As you acknowledge your obligation to improve the talents committed, in the providence of God, to your care, and especially your duty to advance the best interests of the church, not of a sect or party, but of the church of Christ, we may reasonably expect that you will not condemn our scheme without examination, nor withhold your countenance, if you deem us entitled to it, from the merits of our cause.

To our young men just commencing or about to commence the service of Christ in the ministry or otherwise,

we would speak a word of entreaty. See that you build not up the walls of partition. You are desirous of doing something for your Saviour, for your fellow-Christians, and for sinners, upon which you may look back with pleasure, when your race shall have been run, as well as during all the stages of your course. While you resolve to be content with any place which God may assign for the performance of your labours in his vineyard, you will not shrink from occupying a position which may require arduous toil, and persevering watchfulness, and severe self-denial to sustain. Nor would you refuse an employment which bids fair to bring much honour to the Lord you desire to serve, and much of everlasting benefit to immortals souls. Here, then, is presented to you an enterprise worthy the ambition (if that word may be used in an innocent sense) of a Christian soldier, of a youthful Christian soldier, whose bosom beats with ardor to hasten the victory which Christ hath purchased with his blood; an enterprise which, when accomplished, will constitute the "bond of perfectness," to give unity, beauty, and strength to the whole system of means ordained of God, to bring back to their allegiance a revolted, ruined world.

We appeal to Christians of every denomination. We offer you the right hand of fellowship, as belonging to the same family of Christ, exposed to the same dangers, dependent upon the same protector, supported by the same hopes, sustained by the same means of grace, having in view the same end, and hoping to inhabit the same heaven. We long to have the wall of separation between us not lowered merely, but razed to the ground, so that there may be NO division between us, and that we may be one, even as Jesus and the Father are one,

one in affection, in counsel, in action, and in name. Brethren, we have no separate interests; your church is ours, and our church is yours. All things are yours, and all things are ours. We and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Wherefore should we any longer contend? Wherefore should we any more live apart? Has not God put us together, as branches of the same vine, as sheep of the same fold, brethren of the same household, and members of the same body? why then should we suffer men to keep us asunder? On unimportant points we may differ, but why should we contend?

We appeal to the *Christians of America*. To you much is given, and of you much is required. You are unfettered by religious establishments, and to you the task of abolishing sects, and reuniting the church, will be comparatively easy. The church, in this country, is not connected with state, of course the state will not impede her in any scheme of reformation she may pursue, nor will she disturb the state by any changes which she may undergo. We are privileged beyond the rest of the world, in the enjoyment of liberty of conscience, and the pure ministry of the gospel. Let us improve our advantages and facilities.

We close with the following extract from a sermon published in the National Preacher of February, 1834. "To American Christians, it is believed, is assigned in "the purposes of heaven, much of the honour of that "moral renovation of the human family, which is ere "long to be experienced. A little less than a century "since, the immortal Edwards employed his mighty "mind in attempting to show the probability that the "millenium will commence in this country. Whether

"or not this opinion is well founded, there can be no "doubt that Christians in America may have a share in "the high honour of diffusing the blessings of that happy "period throughout the globe. It is a momentous "question, one which ought to come home to every "heart that feels the love of God, whether their share "in this honour shall be great or small. Could I raise "my feeble voice to a note which might be heard through "the breadth of the land, I would urge on every saint "that love to all the household of faith, by which the "Saviour has taught that the disciples shall be known. "I would say to him, brother, as you love the Saviour, "as you desire to see his glories spread around the "world, and the souls of men redeemed from hell, take "heed that whenever you meet an individual bearing "his image, by what name soever he may be called, "you embrace him in the arms of Christian affection, "and be ready to co-operate with him in every good "work. Too long has the church crippled her own "energies, and retarded her growth by mutual dissen- "sion, and the spirit of party. As the brightness of a "more glorious day begins to dawn upon her, O let this "spirit cease, and its place be occupied by that love "which seeketh not her own."

THE END.

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